STORIES OF IMAGINATION

FANTASTIC

DEPT'S GAMBIT

Fritz Leiber

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FANTASTIC

MAY 1964
Volume 13 Number 5

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SHORT NOVEL

ADEPT'S GAMBIT (Fantasy Classic)
By Fritz Leiber 6

NOVELET

GULLIVER'S MAGIC ISLANDS
By Adam Bradford, M.D. .. 98

SHORT STORIES

TO THE VICTOR
By Leo P. Kelley 62

MASTER OF CHAOS
By Michael Moorcock 72

ALL FOR NOTHING
By David R. Bunch 86

FEATURES

EDITORIAL 5

COMING NEXT MONTH 130

Cover: Emsh

Illustrating *Adept's Gambit*

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EDITORIAL

FOR some time we have been bringing you the quaint revisitations of Dr. Adam Bradford to the lands of Gulliver. Indeed, this very issue takes Bradford back to the "Magic Islands" made famous originally by Swift (see page 98). Since our "Swift" is at once literate, humorous and slashingly satiric, we thought you might like to know something about him. He stands revealed as Dr. Joseph Wassersug, a New England internist and medical-school teacher who has for some years been living a double life as a writer of science and medical articles for both popular and technical journals.

The Good Doctor (that is, if friend Asimov will permit the existence of a second Good Doctor who lives in the same state) is at present engaged in completing the Bradford saga by returning his hero to the Land of the Yahoos and Houyhnhnms —a voyage we shall offer you in a future issue. "I got started on this topic," he writes, "when I realized that there are many Yahoos still living, and I wondered what had become of the Yahoos that Gulliver had known." Dr. Wassersug hopes someone may see in his "Gulliver revisted" series the bones of a musical comedy or even a multi-million dollar movie with Kirk Douglas in the lead. We reserve the right to nominate those who will play the parts of Yahoos—mostly typecasting, we think.

ANOTHER status symbol will soon be upon us. Government scientists have developed a personal airconditioner. It is 12 inches long, weighs 6¼ ounces, is worn strapped to one's belt, and delivers cold air—60 degrees below the outside atmosphere—via plastic tubes to parts of the body.

It was originally invented for the use of chemical and atomic plant workers who sweat in dusty, hot or contaminated air, or who must wear heavy protective clothing. Eventually, of course, we will all carry them.

One question: if men wear them on their belts, where will women wear them? And suppose the direction of those plastic tubes gets accidentally changed? Brrrr!—NL

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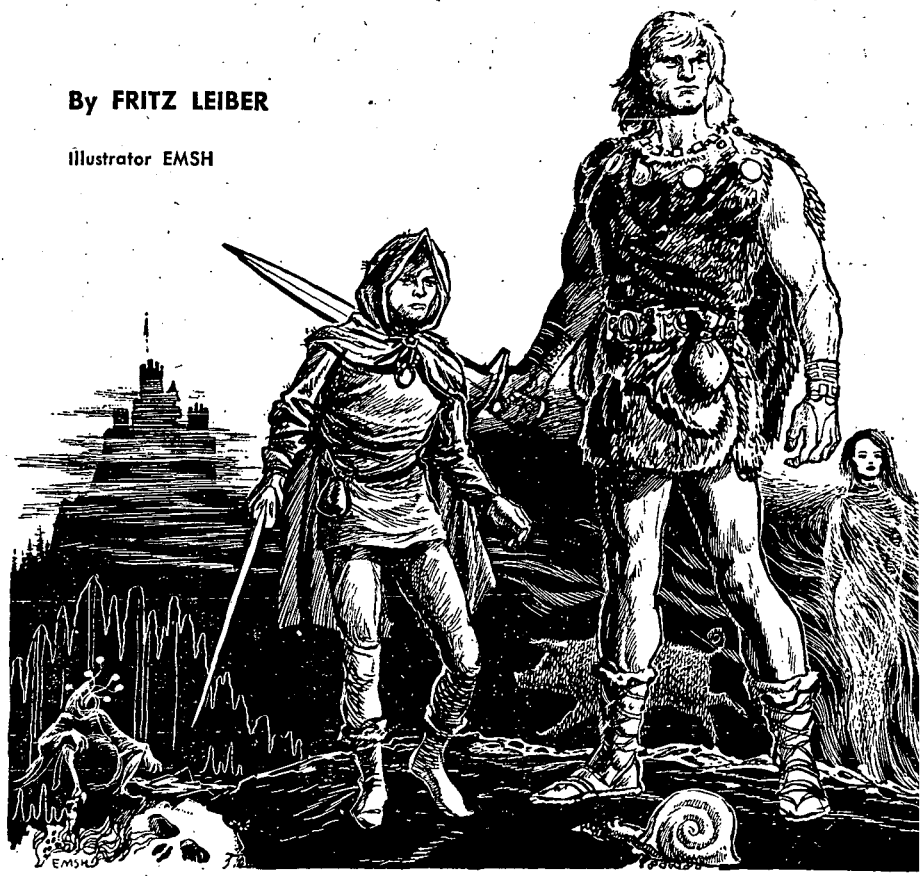
ADEPT'S GAMBIT

The curse lay heavy both on Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser. In the Bottomless Pit, seven-eyed Ningauble warned them of the dangers attendant upon their search for the adept who had bewitched them. "Best," he said, "you should retire from the world. But—if you seek to challenge him—then these things must you do . . ."

By FRITZ LEIBER

Illustrator EMSH



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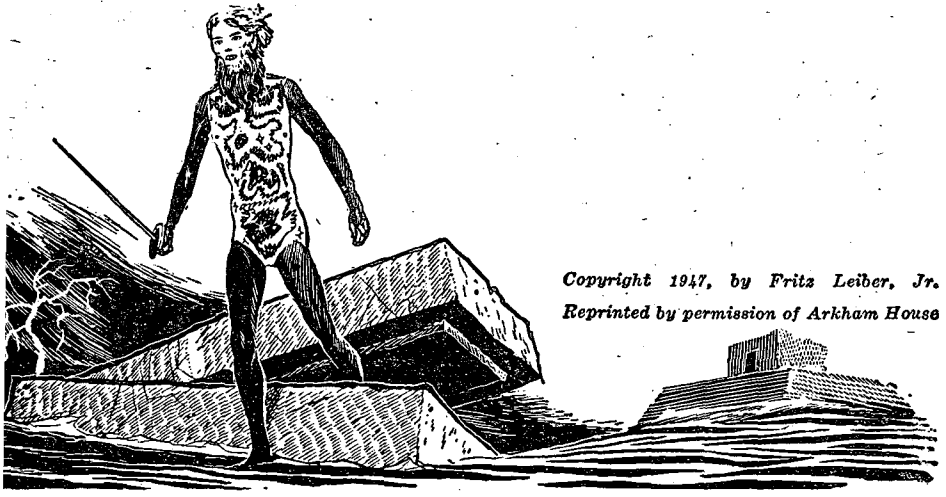
It is rumored by the wise-brained rats which burrow the citied earth and by the knowledgeable cats that stalk its shadows and by the sagacious bats that wing its night and by the sapient zats which soar through airless space, slanting their metal wing to winds of light, that those two swordsmen and blood-brothers Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser have adventured not only in the World of Nehwon with its great empire of Lankhmar, but also in many other worlds and times and dimensions, arriving at these through certain secret doors far inside the mazy caverns of Ningauble of the Seven Eyes. In each new world, the rumor goes, the Mouser and Fafhrd awaken with knowledge and speaking skills and personal memories suitable to it, and Lankhmar then seems to them only a dream and they know not its languages, though it is ever their homeland. It is even whispered that on one occasion they lived a life in that strangest of worlds variously called Gaia, Midgard, Terra, and Earth, swashbuckling there along the eastern shore of an inner sea in kingdoms that were fragments of a vasty empire carved out a century before by one called Alexander the Great ...

—Srith of the Scrolls



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1

Tyre

IT happened that while Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser were dallying in a wine shop of Tyre, where all wine shops are of doubtful repute, a long-limbed yellow-haired Galatian girl lolling in Fafhrd's lap turned suddenly into a wallopingly large sow. It was a singular occurrence, even in Tyre. The Mouser's eyebrows arched as the Galatian's breasts, exposed by the Cretan dress that was the style revival of the hour, became the uppermost pair of slack white dugs, and he watched the whole proceeding with unfeigned interest.

When, with a roar of disgust not unmingled with terror, Fafhrd had shoved the squealing monstrosity halfway across the room so that it fell with a great splash into the water tank, it turned back again into a long-limbed Galatian girl and a very angry one, for the stale water in which the sow had floundered drenched her garments and plastered down her yellow hair and the sow's uncorset-table bulk had split the tight Cretan waist.

The stars of midnight were peeping through the skylight above the tank, and the wine cups had been many times refilled, before her anger was dissipated. Then, just as Fafhrd was impressing a re-introductory kiss upon her melting lips, he felt them once again become slobbering and tusky.

This time she picked herself up from between two wine casks and, ignoring the excited comments, she walked with Amazonian dignity from the room.

She paused only once and then but to hurl at Fafhrd a small dagger, which he absentmindedly deflected upward with his copper goblet, so that it struck full in the mouth a wooden satyr on the wall, giving that deity the appearance of introspectively picking his teeth.

Fafhrd's sea-green eyes became likewise thoughtful as he wondered what magician had made a travesty of his love life. He slowly scanned the wine-shop patrons, face by sly-eyed face, pausing doubtfully when he came to a tall, dark-haired girl beyond the water tank, finally returning to the Mouser. There he stopped, and a certain suspiciousness became apparent in his gaze.

The Mouser folded his arms, flared his snub nose, and returned the stare. Abruptly he turned, embraced and kissed the cross-eyed Greek girl sitting beside him, grinned wordlessly at Fafhrd, dusted from his coarse-woven gray silk robe the antimony that had fallen from her

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eyelids, and folded his arms again.

Fafhrd began softly to beat the base of his goblet against the butt of his palm. His wide, tight-laced leather belt, wet with the sweat that stained his white linen tunic, creaked faintly.

MEANWHILE murmured speculation as to the person responsible for casting a spell on Fafhrd's Galatian eddied around the tables and settled uncertainly on the tall, dark-haired girl, probably because she was sitting alone.

"She's an odd one," Chloe, the cross-eyed Greek, confided to the Mouser. "Silent Salmacis they call her, but I happen to know that her real name is Ahura."

"A Persian?" asked the Mouser.

Chloe shrugged. "She's been around for years, though no one knows exactly where she lives or what she does. She used to be a gay, gossipy little thing, though she never would go with men. Once she gave me an amulet, to protect me from someone, she said—I still wear it. But then she was away for a while," Chloe continued garrulously, "and when she came back she was just like you see her now—shy, and tight-mouthed as a clam, with a look in her eyes of someone peering through a crack in a brothel wall."

"Ah," said the Mouser. He looked at the dark-haired girl, and continued to look, appreciatively, even when Chloe tugged at his sleeve. Chloe gave herself a mental bastinado for having been so foolish as to call a man's attention to another girl.

Fafhrd continued to stare at the Mouser with the stony intentness of a whole avenue of Egyptian colossi.

"Scum of wit-weighted culture," he said, "I consider it the nadir of base perfidy that you should try out on me your puking sorcery."

"Softly, man of strange loves," purred the Mouser. "This unfortunate mishap has befallen several others besides yourself, among them an ardent Assyrian warlord whose paramour was changed into a spider between the sheets, and an impetuous Ethiop who found himself hoisted several yards into the air and kissing a giraffe. Truly, to one who knows the literature, there is nothing new in the annals of magic and thaumaturgy."

"Moreover," continued Fafhrd, his low-pitched voice loud in the silence, "I regard it an additional treachery that you should practice your pig-trickery on a girl honored by my kiss."

"It would not be the first time," observed the Mouser portentously, "that I have had to fight you over a woman."

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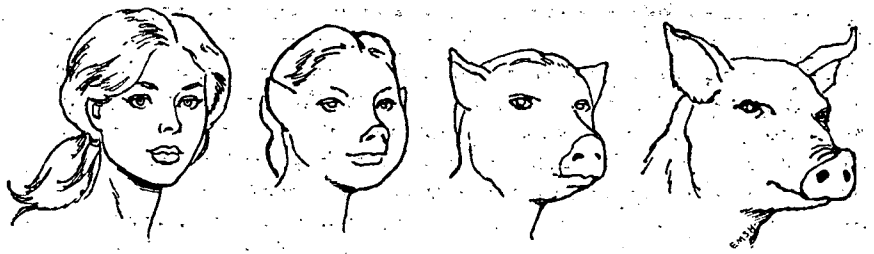

"But it would be the first time," asserted Fafhrd, with an even greater portentousness, "that you had to fight me over a pig!"

For a moment he maintained his belligerent posture, head lowered, jaw outthrust, eyes slitted. Then he began to laugh.

It was something, Fafhrd's laughter. It began with windy snickers through the nostrils, next spewed out between clenched teeth, then became a series of jolting chortles, swiftly grew into a roar against which the barbarian had to brace himself, legs spread wide, head thrown back, as if against a gale. It was a laughter of the storm-lashed forest or the sea, a laughter that conjured up wide visions, that seemed to blow from a primeval, heartier, lusher time. It was the laughter of the Elder Gods observing their creature man and noting their omissions, miscalculations and mistakes.

The Mouser's lips began to twitch. He grimaced wryly, seeking to avoid the infection. Then he joined in.

Fafhrd paused, panted, snatched up the wine pitcher, drained it.

"Pig-trickery!" he bellowed, again.

The Tyrian riff-raff gawked at them in wonder—astounded, awestruck, their imaginations cloudily stirred.

THE dark-haired girl was staring at Fafhrd avidly, drinking in the sound, the oddest sort of hunger and baffled curiosity —and calculation—in her eyes.

The Mouser noticed her and stopped his laughter to watch. Mentally Chloe gave herself an especially heavy swipe on the soles of her bound, naked feet.

Fafhrd's laughter trailed off.

"The dawn stars are peeping," he commented to the Mouser, twisting his head for a look through the skylight, "It's time we were about the business."

And without more ado he and the Mouser left the shop, push-

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ing out of their way a newly arrived and very drunken merchant of Pergamum, who looked after them bewilderedly, as if he were trying to decide whether they were a tall god and his dwarfish servitor, or a small sorceror and the great-thewed automaton who did his bidding.

Had it ended there, two weeks would have seen Fafhrd claiming that the incident of the wine shop was merely a drunken dream that had been dreamed by more than one. But it did not. After "the business"—which was tidewater piracy—and after Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser had returned to the soft embraces and sweet polyglot of the seaport ladies, pig-trickery befell Fafhrd again and yet again, most embarrassingly.

For a while he stubbornly continued to suspect the Mouser, who was forever dabbling in black magic and carried a gray leather case of bizarre instruments picked from the pockets of wizards and recondite books looted from Chaldean libraries—even though long experience had taught Fafhrd that the Mouser seldom read systematically beyond the prefaces in the majority of his books and that he was never able to evoke the same results two times running with his enchantments. That he could manage to transform two of Fafhrd's lights of love was barely possible; that he should get a sow each time was unthinkable. And if there was any doubt left in Fafhrd's mind, it was dispelled when a dark and satiny-skinned Egyptian beauty in the Mouser's close embrace was transformed into a giant snail. The Gray One's disgust at the slimy tracks on his silken garments was not to be mistaken.

FAFHRD'S glee at his friend's discomfiture was short-lived, for after a night of desperate and far-flung experimentation, the Mouser discovered something he had suspected all the time, but had hoped was not the whole truth: namely, that Chloe alone was immune to the strange plague his kisses carried.

Needless to say, this pleased Chloe immensely. An arrogant self-esteem gleamed like two clashing swords from her crossed eyes. She no longer sought to avoid calling the Mouser's attention to other women, in fact she rather enjoyed doing so, and the next time they encountered the dark-haired girl variously called Ahura and Silent Salmacis, she volunteered more information.

"Ahura's not so innocent, you know, in spite of the way she sticks to herself. Once she went off with some old man—that was before she gave me the charm—and once I heard a primped-up

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Persian lady scream at her, 'What have you done with your brother?' Ahura didn't answer, just looked at the woman coldly as a snake. Brr! Beauty like a frosty knife—you'd have been afire for her!"

But the Mouser pretended not to be interested.

Fafhrd could undoubtedly have had Chloe for the polite asking, and Chloe was more than eager to extend and cement in this fashion her control over the twain. But Fafhrd's pride would not allow him to accept such a favor from his friend.

So he perforce led a monastic life and endured curious feminine stares across the drinking table and fended off painted boys who misinterpreted his misogyny and was much irritated by a growing rumor to the effect that he had become a secret eunuch priest of Cybele. While still others whispered that he was a brother of Circe and that he customarily dwelt on a floating island in the Tyrrhenian Sea, where he kept cruelly transformed into pigs a whole herd of beautiful shipwrecked maidens. His laughter was heard no more and dark circles appeared in the white skin around his eyes and he began to make guarded inquiries among magicians in hopes of finding some remedial charm.

"I think I've hit on a cure for your embarrassing ailment," said the Mouser carelessly one night, laying aside a raggedly brown papyrus. "Came across it in this obscure treatise, 'The Demonology of Isaiah ben Elshaz.' It seems that whatever change takes place in the form of the woman you love, you should continue to make love to her, trusting to the power of your passion to transform her back to her original shape."

Fafhrd left off honing his great sword and asked, "Then why don't you try kissing snails?"

"It would be disagreeable and, for one free of barbarian prejudices, there is always Chloe."

"Pah! You're just going with her to keep your self-respect. I know you. For seven days now you'd had thoughts for no one but that Ahura wench."

"A pretty chit, but not to my liking," said the Mouser icily. "It must be your eye she's the apple of. However, you really should try my remedy; I'm sure you'd prove so good at it that the shes of all the swine in the world would come squealing after you."

Whereupon Fafhrd smote at the Mouser and a scuffle ensued which did not end until the Gray One was half strangled and one of Fafhrd's arms dislocated by a method generally known only to men from beyond the Indus.

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THE morning after, Fafhrd awoke when the first hot sunbeams struck the flat roof on which he and the Mouser had chosen to pass the night. He opened an eye on the sight that he in his wisdom had expected: the Mouser sitting on his heels and looking at the sea.

"Son of a wizzard and a witch," he said, "it seems that once again we must fall back upon our last resource."

The Mouser did not turn his head, but he nodded it once, deliberately.

"The first time we did not come away with our lives," Fafhrd went on.

"The second time we lost our souls to the Other Creatures," the Mouser chimed in, as if they were singing a dawn chant to Isis.

"And the last time we were snatched away from the bright dream of Lankhmar."

"He may trick us into drinking the drink, and we not awake for five hundred years."

"He may send us to our deaths and we not to be reincarnated for another two thousand," Fafhrd continued.

"He may whisk us up beyond the stars or plummet us into the under world of Quarmall," the Mouser concluded.

There was a pause of several moments.

Then the Gray Mouser whispered, "Nevertheless, we must visit Ningauble of the Seven Eyes."

And he spoke truly, for as Fafhrd had guessed, his soul was hovering over the sea dreaming of dark-haired Ahura.

2

Ningauble

SO they crossed the snowy Lebanons and stole three camels, and set forth. After seven furnace days of pitching and tossing across the desert, they reached the Sand Combers and the Great Sand Whirlpools, and warily slipping past them while they were only lazily twirling, climbed the Rocky Islet.

With high expectations they tethered their camels, took torches, and entered the Bottomless Caves and soon were passing over the Trembling Bridge spanning the Pit of Ultimate Truth, which could have devoured the light of ten thousand torches without becoming any less black.

They reached the other side with relief and passed a score of tunnel mouths which the Mouser eyed almost wistfully.

"Mayhap we should choose one at random," he muttered, "and seek another world. Ahura's not Aphrodite nor yet Astarte—quite."

"Without Ning's guidance?"

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Fafhrd retorted. "And carrying our curses with us? Press on!"

Presently they saw a faint light flickering on the stalactited roof, reflected from a level above them. Soon they were struggling toward it up the Staircase of Error, an agglomeration of great rough rocks. Fafhrd stretched his long legs; the Mouser leapt catlike.

A little later they stood before the Great Gate, whose iron-studded upper reaches disdained the illumination of the tiny braziered fire at its foot. It was not the gate, however, that interested them, but its keeper, a monstrously paunched creature sitting on the floor beside a vast heap of potsherds, and whose only movement was a rubbing of what seemed to be his hands. He kept them under the shabby but voluminous cloak which also completely hooded his head. A third of the way down the cloak, two large bats clung.

Fafhrd cleared his throat.

The movement ceased under the cloak.

Then out of the top of it sinuously writhed something that seemed to be a serpent, only in place of a head it bore an opalescent jewel with a dark central speck. It restlessly turned this way and that until it pointed at the two strangers. Then it went rigid and the bulbous extremity seemed to glow more brightly. There came a low purring and five similar stalks twisted rapidly from under the hood and aligned themselves with their companion. Then the six black pupils dilated.

"Fat-bellied rumor monger!" hailed the Mouser nervously. "Must you forever play at peep show?"

For one could never quite get over the faint initial uneasiness that came with meeting Ningauble of the Seven Eyes.

"That is an incivility, Mouser," a voice from under the hood quavered thinly. "It is not well for men who come seeking sage counsel to cast fleers before them. Nevertheless I am today in a merry humor and will give ear to your problem. Let me see, now, what world do you and Fafhrd come from?"

"Earth, as you very well know," the Mouser retorted thinly, stepping nearer. Three of the eyes closely followed him, while a fourth kept watch on Fafhrd.

"You think it easy to keep track of the times and spaces and the worlds manifold?" the quavering voice observed. "Very well, Mouser Earthling, I'll hear your problem. But why doesn't your friend come forward?"

Fafhrd had been waiting for that question. Ningauble might be his sorcerous mentor, but that he should let hang from his shoulders two bats whom he

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called Hugin and Munin in open burlesque of Odin's ravens, was too much.

"Slay the bats or send them slithering and I'll come, but not before," he dogmatized.

"Further incivilities," Ningauble murmured sadly, shaking his head so that his eye-stalks jogged. "Ah well, it is time for Hugin and Munin to feed."

The bats unfurled their wings and flew lazily into the darkness.

FAFHRD stirred himself and moved forward, sustaining the scrutiny of all six eyes, the majority of which the Northman considered artfully manipulated puppet-orbs. The seventh eye no man had fully seen, or if he had, he never lived to tell anyone of it.

Crouching on his hams, the Mouser now told the tale of his and Fafhrd's tantalizing bedevilment by maidens changed to sows and snails. At intervals Ningauble would nod or else pick up, seemingly at random, a potsherd from the great pile and rapidly scan the memorandum scribbled on it.

"And you say that Chloe alone proved immune to the spell?" queried Ningauble thoughtfully, tossing a potsherd to the far side of the pile.

"Do you know of any god or demon in whose special favor she stands, or any incantation or rune she habitually mumbles, or any notable talisman, charm, or amulet she customarily wears or inscribes on her body?"

The Mouser said, "There was an amulet given her years ago by some Persian, or Greco-Persian girl."

"Most interesting. Now, when the first sow-change occurred, did Fafhrd laugh the laugh? He did? That was unwise, as I have many times warned you. Advertise often enough your connection with the Elder Gods and you may be sure that some greedy searcher from the pit . . ."

"But what *is* our connection with the Elder Gods?" asked the Mouser, eagerly, though not hopefully. Fafhrd grunted derisively.

"Those are matters best not spoken of," Ningauble ordained. "Was there anyone who showed a particular interest in Fafhrd's laughter?"

The Mouser confessed, "Oh, there was a girl who was perhaps a trifle more attentive than the others to his bellowing. A Persian girl. In fact, as I recall, the same one who gave Chloe the amulet."

"Her name is Ahura," said Fafhrd. "The Mouser's in love with her."

"A fable!" the Mouser denied laughingly, double-daggering Fafhrd with a surreptitious glare. "I can assure you, Father,

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that she is a very shy, sweet girl, who cannot possibly be concerned in any way with our troubles."

"Of course, since you say so," Ningauble observed blandly. "However, I can tell you this much: the one who has placed the ignominious spell upon you is, insofar as he partakes of humanity, a man . . .

". . . and an adept," Ningauble concluded. "Yes, my sons, an adept—a master practitioner of the purest black magic."

The Mouser grimaced. Fafhrd groaned, "Again?"

"Again," Ningauble affirmed. "Though why, save for your connection with the Elder Gods, you should interest those most recondite of creatures, I cannot guess. They are not men who wittingly will stand in the glaringly illuminated foreground of history. They seek the shadows, and surely for good reason. They are the glorious amateurs of high magic, disdaining practical ends, caring only for the satisfaction of their insatiable curiosities, and therefore double dangerous. In short, they are adversaries before whom you should certainly tremble and to whose will you should unquestionably bow."

"But his name, Father, the adept's name!" Fafhrd burst out.

"His name is . . ." Ningauble paused and began to chuckle. "I was forgetting that I must under no circumstances tell you his name."

Fafhrd jumped up angrily. "What?"

"Yes, Children," said Ningauble, suddenly making his eyestalks staringly rigid, stern, and uncompromising. "And I must furthermore advise you that it were best you not seek to lift this curse. Best that you should retire from the world as I have. Best that you should live out the rest of this incarnation in solitude, each surrounded by his faithful band of sows or snails . . ."

Fafhrd growled outragedly and the Mouser hissed in wrath.

"However—" (Ningauble sighed and the sword hesitated) ". . . if it is still your firm and foolhardy intension to challenge this adept, I suppose I must aid you with what little advice I can give, though warning you that it will plunge you into maelstroms of trouble and lay upon you geases you will grow grey in fulfilling, and incidentally be the means of your deaths."

THE silence in the black cave grew heavy and ominous. Then, in a voice that was distant yet resonant, Ningauble began to speak.

"It comes to me, confusedly, like a scene in a rusted mirror; nevertheless, it comes, and thus:

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You must first possess yourselves of certain trifles. The shroud of Ahriman, from the secret shrine near Persepolis—"

"But what about the accursed swordsmen of Ahriman, Father?" put in the Mouser. "There are twelve of them. Twelve, Father, and all very accursed and hard to persuade."

"Do you think I am setting toss-and-fetch problems for puppy dogs?" wheezed Ningauble angrily. "To proceed: You must secondly obtain powdered mummy from the Demon Pharoah, who reined for three horrid and unhistoried midnights after the death of Ikhnaton—"

"But, Father," Fafhrd protested, blushing a little, "you know who owns that powdered mummy, and what she demands of any two men who visit her."

"Shh! I'm your elder, Fafhrd, by eons. Thirdly, you must get the cup from which Socrates drank the hemlock, fourthly a sprig from the original Tree of Life, and lastly . . ." He hesitated as if his memory had failed him, dipped up a potsherd from the pile, and read from it: "And lastly, you must procure the woman who will come when she is ready."

"What woman?"

"The woman who will come when she is ready." Ningauble tossed back the fragment, starting a small landslide of shards.

"Corrode Loki's bones!" cursed Fafhrd, and the Mouser said, "But Father, no woman comes when she's ready."

Ningauble sighed merrily and said, "Do not be downcast, Children. Is it ever the custom of your good friend the Gossiper to give simple advice?"

"It is not," said Fafhrd.

"Well, having all these things, you must go to the Lost City of Ahriman that lies east of Armenia. There you must seek out the ruined black shrine, and place the woman before the great tomb, and wrap the shroud of Ahriman around her, and let her drink the powdered mummy from the hemlock cup, diluting it with a wine you will find where you find the mummy, and place in her hand the sprig from the Tree of Life, and wait for the dawn."

"And then?" rumbled Fafhrd.

"And then the mirror becomes all red with rust. I can see no farther, except that someone will return from a place which it is unlawful to leave, and that you must be wary of the woman."

"But Father, all this scavenging of magical trumpry is a great bother," Fafhrd objected. "Why shouldn't we go at once to the Lost City?"

"Without the map on the shroud of Ahriman?" murmured Ningauble.

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"And you still can't tell us the name of the adept we seek?" the Mouser ventured. "Or even the name of the woman?"

Ningauble shook his head ever so slightly, the six eyes retreated under the hood to become an ominous multiple gleam, and the Mouser felt a shiver on his spine.

"Why is it, Riddle-Vendor, that you always give us half knowledge?" Fafhrd pressed angrily. "Is it that at the last moment our blades may strike with half force?"

Ningauble chuckled.

"It is because I know you too well, Children. If I said one word more, Hulk, you could be cleaving with your great sword—at the wrong person. And your cat-comrade would be brewing his child's magic—the wrong child's magic. It is no simple creature you foolhardily seek, but a mystery, no single identity but a mirage, a stony thing that has stolen the blood and substance of life, a nightmare crept out of dream."

For a moment it was as if, in the far reaches of that nighted cavern, something that waited stirred. Then it was gone.

3

The Woman Who Came

AFTER Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser emerged from the Bottomless Caves into the blinding upper sunlight, their trail for a space becomes dim. Occasionally, however, one comes across the marks they left upon the year.

For instance, a century later the priests of Ahriman were chanting, although they were too intelligent to believe it themselves, the miracle of Ahriman's snatching of his own hallowed shroud. One night the twelve accursed swordsmen saw the blackly scribbled shroud rise like a pillar of cobwebs from the altar, rise higher than mortal man, although the form within seemed anthropoid. Then Ahriman spoke from the shroud, and they worshipped him, and he replied with obscure parables and finally strode giantlike from the secret shrine.

The shrewdest of the century-later priests remarked, "I'd say a man on stilts, or else—" (happy surmise!) "—one man on the shoulders of another."

Then there were the things that Nikri, body slave to the infamous False Laodice, told the cook while she annointed the bruises of her latest beating. Things concerning two strangers who visited her mistress, and the carousal her mistress proposed to them, and how they escaped the black eunuch scimitarmen she had set to slay them when the carousal was done.

"They were magicians, both of

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them," Nikri averred, "for at the peak of the doings they transformed my lady into a hideous, wiggly-horned sow, a horrid chimera of snail and swine. But that wasn't the worst, for they stole her chest of aphrodisiac wines. When she discovered that the demon mummia was gone with which she'd hoped to stir the lusts of Ptolemy, she screamed in rage and took her back-scratcher to me. Ow, but that hurts!"

The cook chuckled.

But as to who visited Hieronymus, the greedy tax farmer and connoisseur of Antioch, or in what guise, we cannot be sure. One morning he was found in his treasure room with his limbs stiff and chill, as if from hemlock, and there was a look of terror on his fat face, and the famous cup from which he had often caroused was missing, although there were circular stains on the table before him. He recovered, but would never tell what had happened.

The priests who tended the Tree of Life in Babylon were a little more communicative. One evening just after sunset they saw the topmost branches shake in the gloaming and heard the snick of a pruning knife. They instantly prepared, some of them to climb the Tree armed with tempered golden sickles, others to shoot down with gold-tipped arrows whatever blasphemer was driven forth, when suddenly a large gray batlike shape swooped from the Tree and vanished behind a jagged wall. Of course, it might conceivably have been a gray-cloaked man swinging on a thin, tough rope, but there were too many things whispered about the creatures that flapped by night through the ruins of Babylon for the priests to dare pursuit.

FINALLY Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser reappeared in Tyre, and a week later they were ready to depart on the ultimate stage of their quest. Indeed, they were already outside the gates, lingering at the landward end of Alexander's mole, spine of an ever-growing isthmus.

It was near evening.

The sun was dipping ruddy-golden into the rippling sea. The merchants who had pitched shop on the landward side were packing up wares and taking down canopies.

Most of Tyre was darkly silhouetted against the sunset, although there were gleams from the roofs here and there, and the gilded peak of the Temple of Melkarth sent a little waterborne glitter track angling in toward the greater one of the sun.

Fafhrd stirred himself.

"Let's wait a while longer,"

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the Mouser suggested. "Ningauble said the woman wouldn't come until she was ready."

A cool little wind came out of the wasteland that was Old Tyre. The merchants hurried; a few of them were already going home along the mole, their slaves looking like hunchbacks and otherwise misshapen monsters because of the packs on their shoulders and heads.

"No," said Fafhrd, "we'll start. And if the woman doesn't come when she's ready, then she isn't the woman who will come when she's ready, or if she is, she'll have to hump herself to catch up."

The three horses of the adventurers moved restlessly and the Mouser's whinnied. Only the great camel, on which were slung the wine-sacks, various small chests, and snugly-wrapped weapons, stood sullenly still. Fafhrd and the Mouser casually watched the one figure on the mole that moved against the homing stream; they were not exactly suspicious, but after the year's doings they could not overlook the possibility of death-dealing pursuers, taking the form either of accursed swordsmen, black eunuch scimitarmen, gold-weaponed Babylonian priests, or such agents as Hieronymus of Antioch might favor.

The sun was a blinding sliver on the sea's rim, then went under. All the little glares and glitters on the roofs of Tyre winked out. The Temple of Melkarth loomed black against the fading sky. The last canopy was being taken down and most of the merchants were more than halfway across the mole. There was still only one figure moving shoreward. Now it came out sharp and black against the sea, a slight figure, not burdened like the slaves.

"Another fool leaves sweet Tyre at the wrong time," observed the Mouser.

The cool wind came again and the packed sand moaned at its passing. Tyre seemed to crouch like a beast against the threats of darkness. A last merchant searched the ground hurriedly for some lost article.

Fafhrd put his hand on his horse's shoulder and said, "Come on."

Then they saw that the other fool leaving sweet Tyre was coming toward them, and that it was a woman, tall and slender, dressed in stuffs that seemed to melt into the waning light, so that Fafhrd found himself wondering whether she truly came from Tyre or from some aerial realm whose inhabitants may venture to earth only at sunset. Then, as she continued to approach at an easy, swinging stride, they saw that her face was fair and that her hair was

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raven; and the Mouser's heart gave a great leap and he felt that he was witnessing the birth of an Aphrodite, not from the foam but the dusk; for it was indeed his dark-haired Ahura of the wine shops, no longer staring with cold, shy curiosity, but eagerly smiling.

Fafhrd, not altogether untouched by similar feelings, said slowly, "So you are the woman who came when she was ready?"

"Yes," added the Mouser gayly, "And did you know that in a minute more you'd have been too late?"

4

The Lost City

DURING the next week, one of steady northward journeying along the fringe of the desert, they learned little more of the motives or history of their mysterious companion than the dubious scraps of information Chloe had provided. When asked why she had come, Ahura replied that Ningauble had sent her, that Ningauble had nothing to do with it and that it was all an accident, that certain dead Elder Gods had dreamed her a vision, that she sought a brother lost in a search for the Lost City of Ahriman; and often her only answer was silence, a silence that seemed sometimes sly and sometimes mystical. However, she stood up well to hardship, proved a tireless rider, and did not complain at sleeping on the ground with only a large cloak snuggled around her. Like some especially sensitive migratory bird, she seemed possessed of an even greater urge than their own to get on with the journey.

Whenever opportunity offered, the Mouser paid assiduous court to her, limited only by the fear of working a snail-change. But after a few days of this tantalizing pleasure, he noticed that Fafhrd was vying for it. Very swiftly the two comrades became rivals and surly toward each other. And Ahura's shy, or sly, silence encouraged them both.

They forded the Euphrates south of the ruins of Carchemish, and struck out for the headwaters of the Tigris. It was then that their surliness came to a head. Ahura had roamed off a little, letting her horse crop the dry herbage, while the two sat on a boulder, and expostulated in whispers, Fafhrd proposing that they both agree to cease paying court to the girl until their quest was over, the Mouser doggedly advancing his prior claim. Their whispers became so heated that they did not notice a white pigeon swooping toward them until it landed with a downward beat of wings on an arm Fafhrd had flung wide to empha-

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size his willingness to renounce the girl temporarily—if only the Mouser would.

Fafhrd blinked, then detached a scrap of parchment from the pigeon's leg, and read, "There is danger in the girl. You must both forgo her."

The tiny seal was an impression of seven eyes.

But this unexpected seconding of Fafhrd's argument finally won from him a sulky consent, and they solemny pledged not to lay hand on the girl, or each in any way to further his cause, until they had found and dealt with the adept.

They were now in a townless land that caravans avoided, a land of chill misty mornings, dazzling noons, and treacherous twilights. Ahura seemed unaware of the sudden cessation of the attentions paid her, remaining as provocatively shy as ever.

THE Mouser's attitude toward Ahura, however, began to undergo a gradual but profound change. Whether it was the souring of his inhibited passion, or the shrewder insight of a mind no longer abubble with the fashioning of compliments and witticisms, he began to feel more and more that the Ahura he loved was only a faint spark almost lost in the darkness of a stranger who daily became more riddlesome, even, repellent.

He remembered the other name Chloe had given Ahura—Silent Salmacis—and found himself brooding oddly over the legend of Hermaphroditus bathing in the Carian fountain and becoming joined in one body with the nymph Salmacis. Now when he looked at Ahura he could see only the avid eyes that peered secretly at the world through a crevice. He began to think of her chuckling soundlessly at night at the mortifying spell that had been laid upon himself and Fafhrd.

He became obsessed with Ahura in a very different way, and took to spying on her and studying her expression when she was not looking.

Fafhrd noticed it and instantly suspected that the Mouser was contemplating going back on his pledge. He restrained his indignation with difficulty and took to watching the Mouser as closely as the Mouser watched Ahura.

They were now nearing that rugged land where, if they could believe Ningauble's geography, they would find the forgotten lair of the Lord of Eternal Evil. At first the archaic map on the shroud of Ahriman proved more maddening than helpful, but after a while, clarified in part by a curiously erudite suggestion of Ahura, it began to make sense.

All the while, the Mouser's obsession deepened, and at last took

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definite and startling form. He believed that Ahura was a man.

It was very strange that the intimacy of camp life and the Mouser's own zealous spying should not long ago have turned up concrete proof or disproof of this clearcut supposition. Nevertheless, as the Mouser wonderingly realized on reviewing events, they had not. From that moment his obsessive curiosity became a compulsive sweat and he redoubled his moody peering, much to the anger of Fafhrd, who took to slapping his sword hilt at unexpected intervals, though without ever startling the Mouser into looking away.

Finally there came a night when he could bear his torturing curiosity no longer. He writhed from under a mountain of oppressive unremembered dreams and, propped on an elbow, looked around him.

IT would have been cold if it had not been so still. The fire had burned to embers. It was rather the moonlight that showed him Fafhrd's touseled head and elbow outthrust from shaggy bearskin cloak. And it was the moonlight that struck full on Ahura stretched beyond the embers, her lidded, tranquil face fixed on the zenith, seeming hardly to breathe.

He waited a long time. Then, without making a sound, he laid back his gray cloak, picked up his sword, went around the fire, and kneeled beside her. Then, for another space, he dispassionately scrutinized her face. But it remained the hermaphroditic mask that had tormented his waking hours. Then he drew back her woolen cloak, took a small knife from his pouch, lifted her gown at the neck, careful not to touch her skin, slit it to her knee, treating her chiton the same.

The breasts, white as ivory, that he had known would not be there, were there. And yet, instead of his nightmare lifting, it deepened.

It was something too profound for surprise, this wholly unexpected further insight. For as he knelt there, somberly studying, he knew for a certainty that this ivory flesh too was a mask, as cunningly fashioned as the face and for as frighteningly incomprehensible a purpose.

The ivory eyelids did not flicker, but the edges of the teeth showed in what he fancied was a deliberate, flickery smile.

He was never more certain than at this moment that Ahura was a man.

The embers crunched behind him.

Turning, the Mouser saw only the streak of gleaming steel poised above Fafhrd's head, motionless for a moment.

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The Mouser ripped out his own slim sword in time to ward the titan blow. From hilt to point, the two blades screamed.

And in answer to that scream, melting into, continuing, and augmenting it, there came from the absolute calm of the west a gargantuan gust of wind that sent the Mouser staggering forward and Fafhrd reeling back, and rolled Ahura across the place where the embers had been.

Almost as suddenly the gale died. As it died, something whipped toward the Mouser's face and he grabbed at it. It felt like papyrus.

The embers, blown into a clump of dry grass, had perversely started a blaze. To its flaring light he held the thin scrap that had fluttered out of the infinite west.

He motioned frantically to Fafhrd, who was clawing his way out of a scrub pine.

There was squid-black writing on the scrap, in large characters, above the tangled seal.

"By whatever gods you revere, give up this quarrel. Press onward at once. Follow the woman."

They became aware that Ahura was peering over their abutting shoulders. The moon came gleamingly from behind the small black tatter of cloud that had briefly obscured it. She looked at them, pulled together chiton and gown, belted them with her cloak. They collected their horses, extricated the fallen camel from the cluster of thorn bushes in which it was satisfiedly tormenting itself, and set out.

After that the Lost City was found almost too quickly; it seemed like a trap or the work of an illusionist. One moment Ahura was pointing out to them a boulder-studded crag; the next, they were looking down on a narrow valley choked with crazily-leaning, moonsilvered monoliths and their accomplice shadows.

Without warning Ahura sent her horse clattering and sliding down the slope.

THEREAFTER it was a hair-brained, drunken gallop, their horses plunging shadows, the camel a lurching ghost, through forests of crude-hewn pillars, past teetering single slabs big enough for palace walls, under lintels made for elephants, always following the elusive hoof-beat, never catching it, until they suddenly emerged into clear moonlight and drew up in an open space between a great sarcophagus with steps leading up to it, and a huge, crudely man-shaped monolith.

But they had hardly begun to puzzle out the things around them before they became aware that Ahura was gesturing impa-

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tiently. They recalled Ningauble's instructions, and realized that it was almost dawn. So they unloaded various bundles and boxes from the shivering, snapping camel, and Fafhrd unfolded the dark, cobwebby shroud of Ahriman and wrapped it around Ahura as she stood wordlessly facing the tomb, her face a marble portrait of eagerness.

While Fafhrd busied himself with other things, the Mouser opened the ebony chest they had stolen from the False Laodice. A fey mood came upon him and, dancing cumbrously in imitation of a eunuch serving man, he tastefully arrayed a flat stone with all the little jugs and jars and tiny amphorae that the chest contained.

Then Fafhrd handed him Socrates' cup and, still prancing and piping, the Mouser measured into it the mummy powder and added the wine and stirred them together and, dancing fantastically toward Ahura, offered it to her. When she made no movement, he held it to her lips and she greedily gulped it without taking her eyes from the tomb.

Then Fafhrd came with the sprig from the Babylonian Tree of Life, which still felt marvellously fresh and firm-leafed to his touch, as if the Mouser had only snipped it a moment ago. And he gently pried open her clenched fingers and placed the sprig inside them and folded them again.

Thus ready, they waited. The sky reddened at the edge and seemed for a moment to grow darker, the stars fading and the moon turning dull. The outspread aphrodisiacs chilled, refusing the night breeze their savor. And the woman continued to watch the tomb, and behind her, seeming to watch the tomb too, as if it were her fantastic shadow, loomed the man-shaped monolith.

The sky paled until Fafhrd could see the green of the leaves in Ahura's hand.

Then he saw something astounding. In an instant the leaves withered and the sprig became a curled and blackened stick. In the same instant Ahura trembled and grew paler still, snow pale, and to the Mouser it seemed that there was a tenuous black cloud forming around her head, that the riddlesome stranger he hated was pouring upward like a smoky jinni from her body, the bottle.

The thick stone cover of the sarcophagus groaned and began to rise.

Ahura began to move toward the sarcophagus. To the Mouser it seemed that the cloud was drawing her along like a black sail.

The cover was moving more

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swiftly, as if it were the upper jaw of a stone crocodile. The black cloud seemed to the Mouser to strain triumphantly toward the widening slit, dragging the white wisp behind it. The cover opened wide. Ahura reached the top and then either peered down inside or, as the Mouser saw it, was almost sucked in along with the black cloud. She shook violently. Then her body collapsed like an empty dress.

Fafhrd gritted his teeth, a joint cracked in the Mouser's wrist. The hilts of their swords, unconsciously drawn, bruised their palms.

Then, like an idler from a day of bowered rest, a slim figure rose from the tomb. His limbs were clad in black, his body in silvery metal, his hair and beard raven and silky.

Above the beard, the face of the black and silver stranger was that of Ahura.

5

Anra Devadoris

RESTING his long hands on the edge of the tomb, the newcomer surveyed them pleasantly and nodded as if they were intimates. Then he vaulted lightly over and came striding down the steps, treading on the shroud of Ahriman without so much as a glance at Ahura.

He eyed their swords. "You anticipate danger?" he asked, politely stroking the beard which, it seemed to the Mouser, could never have grown so bushily silky except in a tomb.

The stranger unbuckled his sword belt and carelessly laid it by, along with the wondrously slim, silver-hilted sword. The Mouser shrugged and sheathed his own weapon, but Fafhrd only grunted.

"I do not like you," he said. "Are you the adept who put the swine-curse on us?"

The stranger regarded him quizzically.

"You are looking for a cause," he said. "You wish to know the name of an agent you feel has injured you. You plan to unleash your rage as soon as you know. But behind every cause is another cause, and behind the last agent is yet another agent. An immortal could not slay a fraction of them. Believe me, who have followed that trail farther than most and who have had some experience of the special obstacles that are placed in the way of one who seeks to live beyond the confines of his skull and the meager present—the traps that are set for him, the titanic enmities he awakens. I beseech you to wait a while before warring. That I am an adept I freely admit."

"There is always a simple way

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of saying things," said Fafhrd ominously.

"But there is where I differ with you," returned the adept, almost animatedly. "There are no ways of saying certain things, and others are so difficult that a man pines and dies before the right words are found. One must borrow phrases from the sky, words from beyond the stars. Else were all an ignorant, imprisoning mockery."

The Mouser stared at the adept, suddenly conscious of a monstrous incongruity about him. For although the adept was obviously erudite, confident, and powerful, the Mouser could not help thinking of a child morbidly avid for experience, a timid, painfully curious small boy.

Fafhrd sheathed his sword, walked over to the woman, held his fingers to her wrists for a moment, then tucked his bearskin cloak around her.

"Her ghost has gone only a little way," he said. "It will soon return. What did you do to her, you black and silver popinjay?"

"What matters what I've done to her or you, or me?" retorted the adept, almost peevishly. "You are here, and I have business with you." He paused. "This, in brief, is my proposal: that I make you adepts like myself, sharing with you all knowledge of which your minds are capable, on condition only that you continue to submit to such spells as I have put upon you and may put upon you in future, to further our knowledge. What do you say to that?"

"Wait, Fafhrd!" implored the Mouser, grabbing his comrade's arm. "Don't strike yet. Let's first look at the statue from all sides. Why, magnanimous magician, have you chosen to make this offer to us, and why have you brought us out here to make it, instead of getting your yes or no in Tyre?"

"An adept" roared Fafhrd, dragging the Mouser along. "Offers to make me an adept! And for that I should go on kissing swine! Go spit down Fenris' throat!"

"As to why I have brought you here," said the adept coolly, "there are certain limitations on my powers of movement, or at least on my powers of satisfactory communication."

"But why pick on *us*? Why?" persisted the Mouser, bracing himself against Fafhrd's tugging.

"Some whys, if you follow them far enough, lead over the rim of reality," replied the black and silver one. "I have sought knowledge beyond the dreams of ordinary men, I have ventured far into the darkness that encircles minds and stars. But now I need new avenues of knowledge."

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HE turned upon them eyes that seemed to be changing to twin holes in a curtain. "There is something in the inmost core of you that lets you laugh in a way that only the Elder Gods ever laughed. Something that makes you see a kind of jest in horror and disillusionment and death. There is much wisdom to be gained by the unravelling of that something."

The stranger continued, "You do not know the treasure you keep virgin and useless within you, or spill in senseless laughter. There is much richness in it, many complexities, destiny-threads that lead beyond the sky to realms undreamt." His voice became swift and invoking. "Have you no itch to understand, no urge for greater adventuring than schoolboy rambles? I'll give you gods for foes, stars for your treasure-trove, if only you will do as I command. All men will be your animals; the best, your hunting pack. The universe will tremble at your lust, but you will master it and force it down. That ancient laughter will give you the might.

"Only submit to me and to my will," the adept continued rapturously, his lips working so that his black beard twitched rhythmically. "All things we'll twist and torture, know their cause. The lechery of gods will pave the way we'll tramp through windy darkness 'til we find the one who lurks in senseless Odin's skull twitching the strings that move your lives and mine. All knowledge will be ours, all for us three. Only give up your wills, submit to me!"

For a moment the Mouser was hypnotized by the glint of ghastly wonders. Then he felt Fafhrd's biceps, which had slackened under his grasp—as if the Northerner were yielding too—suddenly tighten, and from his own lips he heard words projected coldly into the echoing silence.

"Do you think a rhyme is enough to win us over to your nauseous titillations? Fafhrd, this slobberer offends me, past ills that he has done us aside. It only remains to determine which one of us disposes of him. I long to unravel him, beginning with the ribs."

"Do you not understand what I have offered you, the magnitude of the boon? Have we no common ground?"

"Only to fight on. Call up your demons, sorcerer, or else look to your weapon."

An unearthly lust receded, rippling from the adept's eyes, leaving behind only a deadliness. Fafhrd snatched up the cup of Socrates and dropped it for a lot, swore as it rolled toward the Mouser, whose cat-quick hand went softly to the hilt of the

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slim sword called Scalpel. The adept regained his belt and scabbard, drawing from it a blade that looked as delicate and responsive as a needle. He stood, a lank and icy indolence, in the red of the risen sun, the black anthropomorphic monolith looming behind him for his second.

The Mouser drew Scalpel silently from its sheath, ran a finger caressingly down the side of the blade, and in so doing noticed an inscription in black crayon which read, "I do not approve of this step you are taking. Ningauble." With a hiss of annoyance the Mouser wiped it off and concentrated his gaze on the adept—so preoccupiedly that he did not observe the eyes of the fallen Ahura quiver open.

"And now, Dead Sorcerer," said the Gray One lightly, "my name is the Gray Mouser."

"And mine is Anra Devadoris."

INSTANTLY the Mouser put into action his carefully weighed plan: to take two rapid skips forward and launch his blade-tipped body at the adept's sword, which was to be deflected, and at the adept's throat, which was to be sliced. He was already seeing the blood spurt when, in the middle of the second skip, he saw, whirring like an arrow toward his eyes, the adept's blade. With a belly-contorted effort he twisted to one side and parried blindly. The adept's blade whipped in greedily around Scalpel, but only far enough to snag and tear the skin at the side of the Mouser's neck.

The Mouser recovered balance crouching, his guard wide open, and only a backward leap saved him from Anra Devadoris' second serpentlike strike. As he gathered himself to meet the next attack, he gaped amazedly, for never before in his life had he been faced by superior speed.

Fafhrd's face was white. Ahura, however, her head raised a little from the furry cloak, smiled with a weak and incredulous, but evil joy—a frankly vicious joy wholly unlike her former sly, intangible intimations of cruelty.

But Anra Devadoris smiled wider and nodded with a patronizing gratefulness at the Mouser, before gliding in. And now it was the blade Needle that darted in unhurried lightning attack, and Scalpel that whirred in frenzied defense. The Mouser retreated in jerky, circling stages, his face sweaty, his throat hot, but his heart exulting, for never before had he fought this well—not even on that stifling morning when, his head in a sack, he had disposed of a whimsically cruel Egyptian kidnaper.

Needle came slipping in and for the moment the Mouser could

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not tell upon which side of Scalpel it skirred and so sprang backward, but not swiftly enough to escape a prick in the side. He cut viciously at the adept's withdrawing arm—and barely managed to jerk his own arm out of the way of a stop thrust.

In a nasty voice so low that Fafhrd hardly heard her, and the Mouser heard her not at all, Ahura called, "The spiders tickled your flesh ever so lightly as they ran, Anra."

Perhaps the adept hesitated almost imperceptibly, or perhaps it was only that his eyes grew a shade emptier. At all events, the Mouser was not given that opportunity, for which he was desperately searching, to initiate a counterattack and escape the deadly whirligig of his circling retreat. No matter how intently he peered, he could spy no gap in the sword-woven steel net his adversary was tirelessly casting towards him, nor could he discern in the face behind the net any betraying grimace, any flicker of eye hinting at the next point of attack, any flaring of nostrils or distension of lips telling of gasping fatigue similar to his own. It was inhuman, unalive, the mask of a machine. And like a machine, Devadoris seemed to be gaining strength and speed from the very rhythm that was sapping his own.

The Mouser realized that he must interrupt that rhythm by a counterattack, any counterattack, or fall victim to a swiftness become blinding.

And then he further realized that the proper opportunity for that counterattack would never come, that he would wait in vain for any faltering in his adversary's attack, that he must risk everything on a guess.

His throat burned, his heart pounded, numbing poison seeped through his limbs.

Devadoris started a feint, or a deadly thrust, at his face.

Simultaneously, the Mouser heard Ahura jeer, "They hung their webs on your beard and the worms knew your secret parts, Anra."

He guessed—and cut at the adept's knee.

Either he guessed right, or else something halted the adept's deadly thrust.

The adept easily parried the Mouser's cut, but the rhythm was broken and his speed slackened.

Again he developed speed, again at the last possible moment the Mouser guessed. Again Ahura eerily jeered, "The maggots made you a necklace, and each marching beetle paused to peer into your eye, Anra."

Over and over it happened, speed, guess, macabre jeer, but each time the Mouser gained

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only momentary respite, never the opportunity to start an extended counterattack. His circling retreat continued so uninterruptedly that he felt as if he had been caught in a whirlpool. With each revolution, certain fixed landmarks swept into view: Fafhrd's blanched face; the hulking tomb; Ahura's hate-contorted, mocking visage; the red stab of the risen sun; the somber monolith; Fafhrd again. . . .

And now the Mouser knew his strength was failing for good and all. The landmarks whirled dizzily, darkened.

He knew that he would be able to make only one more countercut, and must therefore stake all on a thrust at the heart.

He readied himself.

BUT he had waited too long. He could not gather the necessary strength, summon the speed.

He saw the adept preparing the lightning death-stroke.

His own thrust was like the gesture of a paralyzed man seeking to rise from his bed.

Then Ahura began to laugh.

It was a horrible, hysterical laugh; a giggling, snickering laugh; and yet, for all the difference, a laugh that sounded like a shrill, distorted echo of Fafhrd's or his own.

Puzzledly, he noted that Needle had not yet transfixed him, that Devadoris' lightning thrust was slowing, slowing, as if the hateful laughter were falling in cumbering swathes around the adept.

The Mouser leaned on his own sword and collapsed, rather than lunged, forward.

Then he realized that he was trying to pull Scalpel from the adept's chest and that it was an almost insuperably difficult task, although the blade had gone in as easily as if Anra Devadoris had been a hollow man. Again he tugged, and Scalpel came clear, fell from his nerveless fingers. His knees shook, his head sagged.

Fafhrd, sweat-drenched, watched the adept. Anra Devadoris' rigid body teetered like a stone pillar, slim cousin to the monolith behind him. His lips were fixed in a frozen, foreknowing smile. Then he swayed too far forward and fell like a pillar, without collapse. There was a horrid, hollow crash as his head struck the black pavement.

Ahura's hysterical laughter burst out afresh.

Fafhrd looked at the fallen adept, lying there so formally outstretched, like a tomb-statue rolled over. Dead, Devadoris' lankness was skeletal. He had bled hardly at all from the wound given him by Scalpel, but his forehead was crushed like an eggshell. Fafhrd touched him.

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The skin was cold, the muscles hard as stone.

A hand was laid on his arm. He jerked around. It was Ahura come behind him. The whites showed around her eyes. She smiled at him crookedly, then lifted a knowing eyebrow, put her finger to her lips, and dropped suddenly to her knees beside the adept's corpse. Gingerly she touched the satin smooth surface of the tiny blood-clot on the adept's breast. Fafhrd, noting the resemblance between the dead and the crazy face, sucked in his breath.

A gloating, transcendent vindictiveness came into her face. Then she ran lightly up the steps to the tomb and pointed into it and beckoned to Fafhrd. Slowly he mounted the steps.

Then he looked down.

There were no doors in that cramping cell into which he peered, nor cracks indicating where hidden doors might be. Whatever had come from there, had lived there, where the dry corners were thick with webs and the floor swarmed with maggots, and dung bettles.

6

The Mountain

PERHAPS some chuckling demon, or Ningauble himself, planned it that way. At all events, as Fafhrd stepped down from the tomb, he got his feet tangled in the shroud of Ahriman and bellowed wildly before he noticed the cause, which was by that time ripped to tatters.

Next Ahura, aroused by the tumult, set them into a brief panic by screaming that the black monolith was marching toward them to grind them under its stony feet.

The cup of Socrates momentarily froze their blood by rolling around in a semicircle. Of the withered sprig from the Tree of Life there was no sign, although the Mouser jumped skittishly when he saw a large black scorpion scuttling away from where the sprig might have fallen.

But it was the camel that caused the biggest commotion, by suddenly beginning to prance about clumsily in a most uncharacteristically ecstatic fashion, finally cavorting up eagerly on two legs to the mare, which fled in squealing dismay. The camel must have gotten into the aphrodisiacs, for one of the bottles was pashed as if by a hoof, with only a scummy licked patch showing where its leaked contents had been, and two of the small clay jars were vanished entirely. Fafhrd set out after the two beasts on one of the remaining horses, hallooing crazily.

The Mouser, left alone with Ahura, found his glibness put

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to the test in saving her sanity by a barrage of small talk, mostly well-spiced Tyrian gossip, but including a wholly apocryphal tale of how he and Fafhrd and five small Ethiopian boys once played Maypole with the eyestalks of a drunken Ningauble, leaving him peering about in the oddest directions. He cajoled and comforted her as he might have some lonely waif, finally bringing two funny little hand-puppets from his pouch and letting them amuse her for him.

And Ahura sobbed and stared and shivered, and hardly seemed to hear what nonsense the Mouser was saying, yet grew quiet and saner-eyed though still shivery-fearful.

When Fafhrd eventually returned with the still giddy camel and the outraged mare, he did not interrupt, but listened gravely, his gaze occasionally straying to the dead adept, the black monolith, the stone city, or the valley's downward slope to the north. High over their heads a flock of birds was flying in the same direction. Suddenly they scattered wildly, as if an eagle had dropped among them. Fafhrd frowned. A moment later he heard a whirring in the air. The Mouser and Ahura looked up too, momentarily glimpsed something slim hurtling downward. They cringed. There was a thud as a long whitish arrow buried itself in a crack in the pavement hardly a foot from Fafhrd and stuck there vibrating.

After a moment Fafhrd touched it with shaking hand. The shaft was crusted with ice, the feathers stiff, as if, incredibly, it had sped for a long time through frigid supramundane air. There was something tied snugly around the shaft. He detached and unrolled an ice-brittle sheet of papyrus, which softened under his touch, and read, "Your quest is not ended. Anra Devadoris lies before the black monolith, yet the true adept is not dead, nor are your curses lifted. If you would slay your enemy and save Ahura, go north to the mountaintop. Ningauble."

Fafhrd looked questioningly at the Mouser and he back at him. Then they both looked toward Ahura. She slowly nodded her white frightened face.

The Mouser shrugged and said irresolutely, "Ningauble's a shifty old liar."

Fafhrd said, "Yet has not lied thus far." And then he nodded his face too.

So it was pack up and on again for the three travelers, as if there were not an eon-old dead stone city around them and a lifeless adept warming in the sun. The chest of aphrodisiacs, the cup, and the tattered shroud

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were bundled back onto the camel, which was still busy ogling the mare.

Soon they were jogging off down the valley.

Shortly the way became less barren. Scrub trees and the valley's downward trend hid the city behind them. A surge of relief which the Mouser hardly noticed went through him as the last stony sentinel dipped out of sight, particularly the black monolith left to brood over the adept. He turned his attention to what lay ahead—a conical mountain barring the valley's mouth, likely the mountain Ningauble had meant. It wore a high cap of mist, a lonely thunderhead which the Mouser's imagination shaped into incredible towers and spires.

SUDDENLY his sleepy thoughts snapped awake. Fafhrd and Ahura had stopped and were staring at something wholly unexpected—a low wooden windowless house pressed back among the scrubby trees, with a couple of tilled fields behind it. The rudely carved guardian spirits at the four corners of the roof and topping the kingposts seemed Persian.

And Persian too appeared the thin features, straight nose, and black-streaked beard of the aged man watching them circumspectly from the low doorway.

"Greetings, Father," called the Mouser. "Is this not a merry day for riding, and yours good lands to pass?"

"Yes," replied the aged man dubiously, using a rusty dialect. "Though there are none, or few, who pass."

"Just as well to be far from the evil stinking cities," Fafhrd interjected heartily. "Do you know the mountain ahead, Father?"

The aged man did not answer.

"Is there something wrong about the path we are taking?" the Mouser asked quickly. "Or something evil about that misty mountain?"

The aged man leaned forward and said hurriedly, "I warn you, sons, not to venture farther. What is the steel of your swords, the speed of your steeds, against —but remember" (he raised his voice) "I accuse no one." He looked quickly from side to side. "I have nothing at all to complain of. To me the mountain is a great benefit. My fathers returned here because the land is shunned by thief and honest man alike. There are no taxes on this land—no money taxes. I question nothing." The Mouser chinked the coins in his pouch. "We have heard a tale of a demon that inhabits here—a young demon dressed in black and silver, pale, with a black beard."

As the Mouser was saying

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these things the aged man was edging backward and at the finish he dodged inside and slammed the door, though not before they saw someone pluck at his sleeve. Instantly there came muffled angry expostulation in a girl's voice.

The door burst open. They heard the aged man say ". . . bring it down upon us all." Then a girl of about fifteen came runing toward them. Her face was flushed, her eyes anxious and scared.

"You must turn back!" she called to them as she ran. "None but wicked things go to the mountain—or the doomed. And the mist hides a great horrible castle. And powerful, lonely demons live there. And one of them—"

She clutched at Fafhrd's stirrup. But just as her fingers were about to close on it, she looked beyond him straight at Ahura. An expression of abysmal terror came into her face. She screamed, "He! The black beard!" and crumpled to the ground.

The door slammed and they heard a bar drop into place.

They dismounted. Ahura quickly knelt by the girl, signed to them after a moment that she had only fainted. Fafhrd approached the barred door, but it would not open to any knocking, pleas, or threats. He finally solved the riddle by kicking it down. Inside he saw: the aged man cowering in a dark corner; a woman attempting to conceal a young child in a pile of straw; a very old woman sitting on a stool, obviously blind, but frightenedly peering about just the same; and a young man holding an axe in trembling hands.

Fafhrd stepped out of the way of the young man's feeble axe-blow and gently took the weapon from him.

The Mouser and Ahura brought the girl inside. At sight of Ahura there were further horrified shrinkings.

They laid the girl on the straw, and Ahura fetched water and began to bathe her head.

MEANWHILE, the Mouser, by playing on her family's terror and practically identifying himself as a mountain demon, got them to answer his questions. First he asked about the stone city. It was a place of ancient devil-worship, they said, a place to be shunned. Yes, they had seen the black monolith of Ahriman, but only from a distance. No, they did not worship Ahriman—see the fire-shrine they kept for his adversary Ormadz? But they dreaded Ahriman, and the stones of the devil-city had a life of their own.

Then he asked about the misty

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mountain, and found it harder to get satisfactory answers. The cloud always shrouded its peak, they insisted. Though once toward sunset, the young man admitted, he thought he had glimpsed crazily leaning green towers and twisted minarets. But there was danger up there, horrible danger.

The Mouser turned to the aged man. "You told me," he said harshly, "that my brother demons exact no money tax from you for this land. What kind of tax, then, do they exact?"

"Lives," whispered the aged man, his eyes showing more white.

"Lives, eh? How many? And when do they come for them?"

"They never come. We go. Maybe every ten years, maybe every five, there comes a yellow-green light on the mountaintop at night, and a powerful calling in the air. Sometimes after such a night one of us is gone—one who was too far from the house when the green light came. To be in the house with others helps resist the calling. I never saw the light except from our door, with a fire burning bright at my back and someone holding me. My brother went when I was a boy. Then for many years afterwards the light never came.

"But seven years ago," he continued quaveringly, staring at the Mouser, "there came riding late one afternoon, on two gaunt and death-wearied horses, a young man and an old, and I knew that the masters were returning to the Castle Called Mist. The old man had no beard. The young man had the beginnings of a silky black one. He was dressed in black and silver, and his face was very pale. His features were like—" Here his gaze flickered fearfully toward Ahura. "He rode stiffly, his lanky body rocking from side to side. He looked as if he were dead.

"They rode on toward the mountain without a sideward glance. But ever since that time the greenish-yellow light has glowed almost nightly from the mountaintop, and many of our animals have answered the call—and the wild ones too, to judge from their diminishing numbers. We have been careful, always staying near the house. It was not until three years ago that my eldest son went. He strayed too far in hunting and let darkness overtake him.

"And we have seen the black-bearded young man many times, usually at a distance, treading along the skyline or standing with head bowed upon some crag. Though once when my daughter was washing at the stream she looked up from her clothes-pounding and saw his dead eyes peering through the

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reeds. And once my eldest son, chasing a wounded snow-leopard into a thicket, found him talking with the beast. The old man we have seen too, though not so often. And for the last two years we have seen little or nothing of either, until—" And once again his gaze flickered helplessly toward Ahura.

Meanwhile the girl had come to her senses. This time her terror of Ahura was not so extreme. She could add nothing to the aged man's tale.

They prepared to depart. The Mouser noted a certain veiled vindictiveness toward the girl, for having tried to warn them. So turning in the doorway he said, "If you harm one hair of the girl's head, we will return, and the black-bearded one with us, and the green light to guide us by and wreak terrible vengeance."

He tossed a few gold coins on the floor and departed.

The travelers remounted and rode for a while in silence. As they pressed on up the valley, its silence and the absence of animal and insect life now made sinister, they felt mysteries hovering all around.

Finally the Mouser voiced what was in the thoughts of Fafhrd too. "Yes, I am much afraid that Anra Devadoris, who sought to make us his apprentices, was only an apprentice himself and apt, apprentice-wise, to take credit for his master's work. Black-beard is gone, but the beardless one remains. What was it Ningauble said? . . . no simple creature, but a mystery? . . . no single identity, but a mirage?"

"Well, by all the fleas that bite the Great Antiochus, and all the lice that tickle his wife!" remarked a shrill, insolent voice behind them. "You doomed gentlemen already know what's in this letter I have for you."

THEY whirled around. Standing beside the camel—he might conceivably have been hidden, it is true, behind a nearby boulder—was a pertly grinning brown urchin, so typically Alexandrian that he might have stepped this minute out of Rakotis with a skinny mongrel sniffing at his heels. The Mouser half expected such a dog to appear at the next moment.

"Who sent you, boy?" Fafhrd demanded. "How did you get here?"

"Now who and how would you expect?" replied the urchin. "Catch." He tossed the Mouser a wax tablet. "Say, you two, take my advice and get out while the getting's good. I think so far as your expedition's concerned, Ningauble's pulling up his tent pegs and scuttling home."

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The Mouser ripped the cords, unfolded the tablet, and read:

"Greetings, my brave adventurers. You have done well, but the best remains to be done. Hark to the calling. Follow the green light. But be very cautious afterwards. I wish I could be of more assistance. Send the shroud, the cup, and the chest back with the boy as first payment."

There was a clomping. The Mouser looked up to see the urchin lurching and bobbing back toward the Lost City on the back of the eagerly fugitive camel. His impudent laughter returned shrill and faint.

"Good-by, Ningauble," the Mouser called softly.

"Not a very high mountain," he said an hour later, "but high enough. I wonder who carved this neat little path and who keeps it clear?"

As he spoke, he was winding loosely over his shoulder a long thin rope of the sort used by mountain climbers, ending in a hook.

It was sunset, with twilight creeping at their heels. The little path, which had grown out of nothing, only gradually revealing itself, now led them sinuously around great boulders and along the crests of ever steeper rock-strewn slopes.

It was a moment when the whole universe seemed to pause. A spectral greenish light gleamed from the cloudy top ahead—but that was surely only the sun's sky-reflected afterglow. There was a hint of all-pervading sound in the air, a mighty susurrus just below the threshold of hearing, as if an army of ghost insects were tuning up their instruments. These sensations were as intangible as the force that drew them onward, a force so feeble that they knew they could break it like a single spider-strand, yet did not choose to try.

As if in response to some unspoken word, both Fafhrd and the Mouser turned toward Ahura. Under their gaze she seemed to be changing momently, opening like a night flower.

They felt their infatuation pulse anew, but with a shy restraint on it. And their hearts fell silent as the hooded heights above, as she said, "Anra Devadoris was my twin brother."

7

Ahura Devadoris

I NEVER knew my father. In one of her rare fits of communicativeness my mother told me, 'Your father was a Greek, Ahura. A very kind and learned man. He laughed a great deal.' I remember how stern she looked as she said that, rather than

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how beautiful, the sunlight glinting from her ringletted, black-dyed hair.

"But it seemed to me that she had slightly emphasized the word 'Your.' You see, even then I wondered about Anra. So I asked Old Berenice the housekeeper about it. She told me she had seen mother bear us, both on the same night.

"Old Berenice went on to tell me how my father had died. Almost nine months before we were born, he was found one morning beaten to death in the street just outside the door. A gang of Egyptian longshoremen who were raping and robbing by night through Tyre were supposed to have done it, although they were never brought to justice. It was a horrible death. He was almost pashed to a pulp against the cobbles.

"At another time Old Berenice told me something about my mother, after making me swear by Athena and by Set and by Moloch, who would eat me if I did, never to tell. She said that mother came from a Persian family whose first daughters in the old times were all priestesses, dedicated from birth to be the wives of an evil Persian god, forbidden the embraces of mortals, doomed to spend their nights alone with the stone image of the god in a lonely temple 'half-way across the world,' she said. Mother was away that day and Old Berenice dragged me down into a little basement under Mother's bedroom and pointed out three ragged gray stones set among the bricks and told me they came from the temple. Old Berenice liked to frighten me, although she was deathly afraid of Mother.

"Of course I instantly went and told Anra, as I always did."

The little path was leading sharply upward now, along the spine of a crest. Their horses went at a walk, first Fafhrd's, then Ahura's, last the Mouser's.

Ahura continued, "It is hard to make you understand my relationship with Anra, because it was so close and yet so innocent at first. There was a game we would play in the garden. He would close his eyes and guess what I was looking at. In other games we would change sides, but never in this one.

"He invented all sorts of versions of the game and didn't want to play any others. Sometimes I would climb up by the olive tree onto the tiled roof—Anra couldn't make it—and watch for an hour. Then I'd come down and tell him what I'd seen—some dyers spreading out wet green cloth for the sun to turn it purple, a procession of priests around the Temple of Melkarth, a galley from Pergamum setting sail, a Greek offi-

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cial impatiently explaining something to his Egyptian scribe, two henna-handed ladies giggling at some kilted sailors, a mysterious and lonely Jew—and he would tell me what kind of people they were and what they had been thinking and what they were planning to do. It was a very special kind of imagination, for afterwards when I began to go outside I found out that he was usually right. At the time I remember thinking that it was as if he were looking at the pictures in my mind and seeing more than I could. I liked it. It was such a gentle feeling.

"Of course our closeness was partly because mother wouldn't let us mix with other children. There was more reason for that than just her strictness. Anra was very delicate. He once broke his wrist and it was a long time healing. Mother had a slave come in who was skilled in such things, and he told mother he was afraid that Anra's bones were becoming too brittle. He told about chilrden whose muscles and sinews gradually turned to stone, so that they became living statues. Mother struck him in the face and drove him from the house.

"And even if Anra had been allowed to go out, he couldn't have. Once after I had begun to got outside I persuaded him to come with me. He didn't want to, but I laughed at him, and he could never stand laughter. As soon as we climbed over the garden wall he fell down in a faint and I couldn't rouse him from it. Finally I climbed back so I could open the door and drag him in, and Old Berenice spotted me. She helped me carry him in, but afterwards she whipped me because she knew I'd never dare tell mother I'd taken him outside. Anra came to his senses while she was whipping me, but he was sick for a week afterwards. I don't think I ever laughed at him after that, until today.

COOPED up in the house, Anra spent most of the time studying. He would stay in father's library, reading, or learning some new language from father's grammars and translations. Anra was far cleverer than I at reading. He loved letters as passionately as I did the outside.

"Father's library had been kept just as it was when he died. Neatly stacked in canisters were all the renowned philosophers, historians, poets, rhetoricians, and grammarians. But tossed in a corner along with potsherds and papyrus scraps like so much trash, were rolls of a very different sort. Across the back of one of them my father had scribbled, derisively I'm sure, in his big impulsive hand,

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'Secret Wisdom!' It was those that from the first captured Anra's curiosity. He would read the respectable books in the canisters, but chiefly so he could go back and take a brittle roll from the corner, blow off the dust, and puzzle out a little more.

"They were very strange books. Some of them told what dreams meant and gave directions for working magic—all sorts of nasty things to be cooked together. Others—Jewish rolls in Aramaic—were about the end of the world and wild adventures of evil spirits and mixed-up, messy monsters—things with ten heads and jeweled cartwheels for feet, things like that. Then there were Cahldean star-books that told how all the lights in the sky were alive and their names and what they did to you. But it was in a sensational Greek roll that Anra first found out about Ahriman and his eternal empire of evil, and after that he couldn't wait until he'd mastered Old Persian. But none of the few Old Persian rolls in father's library were about Ahriman, so he had to wait until I could steal such things for him outside.

"My going outside was after mother changed her way of life. That happened when I was seven. She was always a very moody and frightening woman, strict toward me, but she always spoiled and pampered Anra, though from a distance, through the slaves, almost as if she were afraid of him.

"Now her moods became blacker and blacker. Sometimes I'd surprise her looking in horror at nothing, or beating her forehead while her eyes were closed and her beautiful face was all taut, as if she were going mad. I had the feeling she'd been backed up to the end of some underground tunnel and must find a door leading out, or lose her mind.

"Then one afternoon I peeked into her bedroom and saw her looking into her silver mirror. For a long, long while she studied her face in it. Finally she seemed to make some sort of difficult inward effort and the lines of anxiety and sternness and fear disappeared from her face, leaving it smooth and beautiful as a mask. Then she unlocked a drawer I'd never seen into before and took out all sorts of little pots and vials and brushes. With these she colored and whitened her face and carefully smeared a dark, shining powder around her eyes and painted her lips reddish-orange. Then she laid down her brushes and dropped her chiton and felt of her throat and breasts in a thoughtful way and took up the mirror and looked at herself with a cold satisfaction. She was very beau-

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tiful, but it was a beauty that troubled me. I ran to tell Anra and find out what it meant. But this time his cleverness failed him. He was as puzzled and disturbed as I.

IT was right afterwards that she became even stricter with me, and although she continued to spoil Anra from a distance, kept us shut up from the world more than ever. I wasn't even allowed to speak to the new slave she'd bought, an ugly, smirking, skinny-legged girl named Phryne who used to massage her and sometimes play the flute. There were all sorts of visitors coming to the house now at night, but Anra and I were always locked in our little bedroom high up by the garden. We'd hear them yelling through the wall and sometimes screaming and bumping around the inner court to the sound of Phryne's flute. Sometimes I'd lie staring at the darkness in an inexplicable sick terror all night long. I tried every way to get Old Berenice to tell me what was happening, but for once her fear of mother's anger was too great. She'd only leer at me.

"Finally Anra worked out a plan for finding out. When he first told me about it, I refused. It terrified me. That was when I discovered the power he had over me. Up until that time the things I had done for him had been part of a game I enjoyed as much as he. I had never thought of myself as a slave obeying commands. But now when I rebelled, I found out not only that my twin had an obscure power over my limbs, so that I could hardly move them at all, if he were unwilling, but also that I couldn't bear the thought of him being unhappy or frustrated.

"Night came. As soon as we were locked in I let a knotted cord out the little high window and wriggled out and climbed down. Then I climbed the olive tree to the roof. I crept over the tiles down to the square skylight of the inner court and managed to squirm over the edge—I almost fell—into a narrow, cobwebby space between the ceiling and the tiles. There was a faint murmur of talk from the dining room, but the court was empty. I lay still as a mouse and waited."

Fafhrd uttered a smothered exclamation and stopped his horse. The others did the same. A pebble rattled down the slope, but they hardly heard it. Seeming to come from the heights above them and yet to fill the whole darkening sky was something that was not entirely a sound, something that tugged at them like the Sirens' voices at fettered Odysseus. For a while they listened incredulously, then

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Fafhrd shrugged and started forward again, the others following.

Ahura continued, "For a long time nothing happened, except occasionally slaves hurried in and out with full and empty dishes, and there was some laughter, and I heard Phryne's flute. Then suddenly the laughter grew louder and changed to singing, and there was the sound of couches pushed back and the patter of footsteps, and in they swept.

"Phryne, naked, piped the way. My mother followed, laughing, her arms linked with those of two dancing young men, but clutching to her bosom a large silver wine-bowl. The wine sloshed over and stained purple her white silk chiton around her breasts, but she only laughed and reeled more wildly. After those came many others, men and women, young and old, all singing and dancing. One limber young man skipped high, clapping his heels, and one fat old grinning fellow panted and had to be pulled by girls, but they kept it up three times around the court before they threw themselves down on the couches and cushions. They chattered and laughed and kissed and embraced and played pranks and watched a naked girl prettier than Phryne dance.

"I was astounded—and entranced. I had been almost dead with fear, expecting I don't know what cruelties and horrors. Instead, what I saw was wholly lovely and natural. The revelation burst on me, 'So this is the wonderful and important thing that people do.' My mother no longer frightened me. Though she still wore her new face, there was no longer any hardness about her, inside or out, only joy and beauty. Even Phryne, squatting on her heels like a skinny boy as she piped, seemed for once unmalicious and likable. I couldn't wait to tell Anra.

"There was only one disturbing note, and that was so slight I hardly noticed it. Two of the men who took the lead in the joking, a young red-haired fellow and an older chap with a face like a lean satyr, seemed to have something up their sleeves. I saw them whisper to some of the others. And once the younger grinned at mother and shouted, 'I know something about you from way back!' And once the older called at her mockingly, 'I know something about your great-grandmother, you mantrap you!' Each time mother laughed and waved her hand derisively, but I could see that she was bothered underneath. Eventually the two men drifted out, and from then on there was nothing to mar the fun.

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THE dancing became wilder and staggering, the laughter louder, more wine was spilt than drank. Then Phryne threw away her flute and ran and landed in the fat man's lap with a jounce that almost knocked the wind out of him. Four or five of the others tumbled down.

"Just at that moment there came a crashing and a loud rending of wood, as if a door were being broken in. Instantly everyone was as still as death. Someone jerked around and a lamp snuffed out, throwing half the court into shadow.

"Then loud, shaking footsteps, like two paving blocks walking, sounded through the house, coming nearer and nearer.

"Everyone was frozen, staring at the doorway. Phryne still had her arm around the fat man's neck. But it was in mother's face that the truly unbearable terror showed. She had retreated to the remaining lamp and dropped to her knees there. The whites showed around her eyes. She began to utter short, rapid screams, like a trapped dog.

"Then through the doorway clomped a great ragged-edged, square-limbed, naked stone man fully seven feet high. His face was just expressionless black gashes in a flat surface, and before him was thrust a mortar-crusted stone member. I couldn't bear to look at him, but I had to. He tramped echoingly across the room to mother, jerked her up, still screaming, by the hair, and with the other hand ripped down her wine-stained chiton. I fainted.

"But it must have ended about there, for when I came to, sick with terror, it was to hear everyone laughing uproariously. Several of them were bending over mother, at once reassuring and mocking her, the two men who had gone out among them, and to one side was a jumbled heap of cloth and thin boards, both crusted with mortar. From what they said I understood that the red-haired one had worn the horrible disguise, while satyr-face had made the footsteps by rhythmically clomping on the floor with a brick, and had simulated the breaking door by jumping on a propped-up board.

"'Now tell us your great-grandmother wasn't married to a stupid old stone demon back in Persia!' he jeered pleasantly, wagging his finger.

"Then came something that tortured me. Although she was white as milk and barely able to totter, mother did her best to pretend that the loathsome trick they'd played on her was just a clever joke. I knew why. She was horribly afraid of losing their friendship and would have done anything rather than be left alone.

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"Her pretence worked. They drank until they sprawled out snoring. I waited until almost dawn, then summoned all my courage, made my stiff muscles pull me up onto the tiles, cold and slippery with dew, and dragged myself back to our room.

"But not to sleep. Anra was awake and avid to hear what had happened. I begged him not to make me, but he insisted. I had to tell him everything. The pictures of what I'd seen kept bobbing up in my wretchedly tired mind so vividly that it seemed to be happening all over again. He asked all sorts of questions, wouldn't let me miss a single detail. I had to relive that first thrilling revelation of joy, tainted now by the knowledge that the people were mostly sly and cruel.

"When I got to the part about the stone image, Anra became terribly excited. But when I told him about it all being a nasty joke, he seemed disappointed. He became angry, as if he suspected me of lying.

"Finally he let me sleep.

"The next night I went back to my cubbyhole under the tiles. Anra made me."

Again Fafhrd stopped his horse. The mist masking the mountaintop had suddenly begun to glow, as if a green moon were rising, or as if it were a volcano spouting green flames. The hue tinged their upturned faces. It lured like some vast cloudy jewel. Fafhrd and the Mouser exchanged a glance of fatalistic wonder. Then all three proceeded up the narrowing ridge.

ANURA continued, "Then I started to go outside, and a whole new world opened to me.

"Those people I had watched from the roof—I could touch them now, follow them around corners, make friends with them—and I soon found that I could make friends almost anywhere. Every person I met seemed a wonderful mystery, something to be smiled and chattered at. I dressed as a slave-child, and all sorts of folk got to know me and expect my coming—other slaves, tavern wenches and sellers of sweetmeats, street merchants and scribes, errand boys and boatmen, seamstresses and cooks. I made myself useful, ran errands myself, listened delightedly to their endless talk, passed on gossip I'd heard, gave away bits of food I'd stolen at home, became a favorite. It seemed to me I could never get enough of Tyre. I scampered from morning to night. It was generally twilight before I climbed back over the garden wall.

"I couldn't fool Old Berenice, but I found a way to escape her

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whippings. I threatened to tell mother it was she who had told red-hair and satyr-face about the stone image. After that, she would only mumble venomously whenever I sneaked in after sunset. As for mother, she was getting farther away from us all the time, alive only by night, lost by day in frightened brooding.

"Then, each evening, came another delight. I would tell Anra everything I had heard and seen, each new adventure, each little triumph. Like a magpie I brought home for him all the bright colors, sounds, and odors. Like a magpie I repeated for him the babble of strange languages I'd heard, the scraps of learned talk I'd caught from priests and scholars. I forgot what he'd done to me. We were playing the game again, the most wonderful version of all. Often he helped me, suggesting new places to go, new things to watch for.

"It seemed as though Anra were now able sometimes to see the pictures in my mind even when I was away from him. I felt ever so close to him.

"I was wild for him to come out with me, but as the years passed, he seemed to become tied even tighter to the house. Once when mother vaguely talked of moving to Antioch, he fell ill and did not recover until she had promised we would never go.

"Meanwhile he was growing up into a slim and darkly handsome youth. Phryne began to make eyes at him and sought excuses to go to his room. But he was frightened and rebuffed her. However, he coaxed me to make friends with her, although mother had forbidden it, to go to her room, talk to her, be near her, even share her bed those nights when mother did not want her. He seemed to like that.

"You know the restlessness that comes to a maturing child, when he seeks love, or adventure, or the gods, or all three. That restlessness had come to Anra, but his only gods were in those dusty, dubious rolls my father had labeled 'Secret Wisdom!' I hardly knew what he did by day any more except that there were odd ceremonies and experiments mixed with his studies. Some of them he conducted in the little basement where the three gray stones were. At such times he had me keep watch. He no longer told me what he was reading or thinking, and I was so busy in my new world that I hardly noticed the difference.

"And yet I could see the restlessness growing. He sent me on longer and more difficult missions, had me inquire after books the scribes had never heard of, seek out all manner of astrologers and wise-women, required

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me to steal or buy stranger and stranger ingredients from the herb doctors. And when I did win such treasures for him, he would only snatch them from me unjoyfully and be twice as gloomy the evening after. He sometimes hardly listened to my detailed reports, as if he had already glanced through them and knew they contained nothing to interest him.

"He had embarked on a dark, mysterious quest I did not understand, and he had reached a bitter, corroding impasse where of his own experience he could go no farther.

"He needed a teacher."

8

The Old Man Without a Beard

I WAS fifteen when I met the Old Man Without a Beard. I called him that then and I still call him that, for there is no other distinguishing characteristic my mind can seize and hold. Whenever I think of him, even whenever I look at him, his face melts into the mob. It is as if a master actor, after portraying every sort of character, should have hit on the simplest and most perfect of disguises.

"As to what lies behind that too-ordinary face—all I can say is a satiety and an emptiness that are not of this world."

Fafhrd caught his breath. They had reached the end of the ridge. The leftward slope had suddenly tilted upward, become the core of the mountain. While the rightward slope had swung downward and out of sight, leaving an unfathomable black abyss. Between, the path continued upward, a stony strip only a few feet wide. The Mouser touched reassuringly the coil of rope over his shoulder. For a moment their horses hung back. Then, as if the faint green glow and the ceaseless murmuring that bathed them were an intangible net, they were drawn on.

"I was in a wine shop. I had just carried a message to one of the men-friends of the Greek girl Chloe, hardly older than myself, when I noticed him sitting in a corner. I asked Chloe about him. She gave him a quick puzzled look, decided that she didn't know him and that it didn't matter.

"But his very emptiness intrigued me. Here was a new kind of mystery. After I had been watching him for some time, he turned around and looked at me. I had the impression that he had been aware of my inquiring gaze from the beginning, but had ignored it as a sleepy man a buzzing fly.

"After that one glance he slumped back into his former po-

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sition, but when I left the shop he walked at my side.

" 'You're not the only one who looks through your eyes, are you?' he said quietly.

"I was so startled by his question that I didn't know how to reply, but he didn't require me to. His face brightened without becoming any more individualized and he immediately began to talk to me in the most charming and humorous way, though his words gave no clue as to who he was or what he did.

"However, I gathered from hints he let fall that he possessed some knowledge of those odd sorts of things that always interested Anra and so I followed him willingly, my hand in his.

"But not for long. Our way led up a narrow twisting alley, and I felt his hand tighten on mine.

"We passed a tenement and stopped at a rickety three-story shack leaning against it. He said his dwelling was at the top. He was drawing me toward the ladder that served for stairs.

"I did not wait any longer, but jerked away and ran, my fear growing greater with every step.

WHEN I reached home, Anra was pacing like a leopard. I was eager to tell him all about my narrow escape, but he kept interrupting me to demand details of the Old Man and angrily flirting his head because I could tell him so little. Then, when I came to the part about my running away, an astounding look of tortured betrayal contorted his features, he raised his hands as if to strike me, then threw himself down on the couch, sobbing.

"But as I leaned over him anxiously, his sobs stopped. He looked around at me, over his shoulder, his face white but composed, and said, 'Ahura, I must know everything about him.'

"In that one moment I realized all that I had overlooked for years—that I was only a tool to Anra, a slave to be sent on errands, an unfeeling extension of his own body, a tentacle he could lose and grow again, like an octopus—that our very closeness, so that we were only two halves of one mind, was to him only another tactical advantage.

"The end was that I went back to the narrow alley, the lowering tenement, the rickety shack, the ladder, the third story, and the Old Man Without a Beard.

"I didn't give in without a struggle. Once I was out of the house I fought every inch of the way. Up until now, even in the cubbyhole under the tiles, I had only to spy and observe for Anra. I had not to do things, or have them done to me.

"But in the end it was the same. I dragged myself up the last rung and knocked on the

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warped door. It swung open at my touch. Inside, across a fumy room, behind a large empty table, by the light of a single lamp, his eyes as unwinking as a fish's, and upon me, sat the Old Man Without a Beard."

Ahura paused, and Fafhrd and the Mouser felt a clamminess descend upon their skins. Looking up, they saw uncoiling downward from dizzy heights, like the ghosts of constrictive snakes or jungle vines, thin tendrils of green mist.

"Yes," said Ahura, "there is always mist or smokiness of some sort where he is.

"Three days later I returned to Anra and told him everything —a corpse giving testimony as to its murderer. But in this instance the judge relished the testimony, and when I told him of a certain plan the Old Man had in mind, an unearthly joy shimmered on his face.

"The Old Man was to be hired as a tutor and physician for Anra. This was easily arranged, as mother always acceded to Anra's wishes. Within a matter of weeks the Old Man had quietly established a mastery over everyone in the house—some, like mother, merely to be ignored; others, like Phryne, ultimately to be used.

ANRA'S new education began. Everything that had happened was, as it were, repeated on a deeper, stranger level. There were languages to be learned, but not any languages to be found in human books; rituals to be intoned, but not to any gods that ordinary men have worshipped; magic to be brewed, but not with herbs that I could buy or steal. Daily Anra was instructed in the ways of inner darkness, the sicknesses and unknown powers of the mind, the eon-buried emotions that must be due to insidious impurities the god overlooked in the earth from which they made man. By silent stages our home became a temple of the abominable, a monastery of the unclean.

"Yet there was nothing of tainted orgy, of vicious excess about their actions. Whatever they did, was done with strict self-discipline and mystic concentration. There was no looseness anywhere about them. They aimed at a knowledge and a power, born of darkness, true, but one which they were willing to make any self-sacrifice to obtain. They were religious, with this difference: their ritual was degradation, their aim a world chaos played upon like a broken lyre by their master minds, their god the quintessence of evil, Ahriman, the ultimate pit.

"As if performed by sleepwalkers, the ordinary routine of our home went on. Indeed, I sometimes felt that we were all

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of us, except Anra, merely dreams behind the Old Man's empty eyes—actors in a deliberate nightmare.

"Each morning I went out and made my customary way through Tyre, chattering and laughing as before, but emptily, knowing that I was no more free than if visible chains leashed me to the house, a puppet dangled over the garden wall. Only at the periphery of my masters' intentions did I dare oppose them even passively—once I smuggled the girl Chloe a protective amulet because I fancied they were considering her as a subject for such experiments as they had tried on Phryne. And daily the periphery of their intentions widened—indeed, they would long since have left the house themselves, except for Anra's bondage to it.

"It was to the problem of breaking that bondage that they now devoted themselves. I was not told how they hoped to manage it, but I soon realized that I was to play a part.

"They would shine glittering lights into my eyes and Anra would chant until I slept. Hours or even days later I would awake to find that I had gone unconsciously about my daily business, my body a slave to Anra's commands. At other times Anra would wear a thin leather mask which covered all his features, so that he could only see, if at all, through my eyes. My sense of oneness with my twin grew steadily with my fear of him.

"Then came a period in which I was kept closely pent up. Again I crouched for hours in the cubbyhole under the tiles or on reed mats in the little basement. And now it was my eyes and ears that were covered rather than Anra's. For hours I, whom sights and sounds had nourished more than food, could see nothing but fragmentary memories of the child-Anra sick, or the Old Man across the fumy room, or Phryne writhing on her belly and hissing like a snake.

"Finally came a day when the Old Man loosened the mask from my face. There could hardly have been more than a glimmer of light, but my long-blindfolded eyes made out every detail of the little basement with a painful clarity. The three gray stones had been dug out of the pavement. Supine beside them lay Anra, emaciated, pale, hardly breathing, looking as though he were about to die."

THE three climbers stopped, confronted by a ghostly green wall. The narrow path had emerged onto what must be the mountain's tablelike top. Ahead stretched a level expanse of dark rock, mist-masked after the first few yards. Without a word

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they dismounted and led their trembling horses forward into a moist realm which, save that the water was weightless, most resembled a faintly phosphorescent sea-bottom.

"My heart leaped out toward my twin in pity and horror. I realized that despite all tyranny and torment I still loved him more than anything in the world, loved him as a slave loves the weak, cruel master who depends for everything on that slave. And I felt more closely linked to him, our lives and deaths interdependent, than if we had been linked by bonds of flesh and blood, as some rare twins are.

"The Old Man told me I could save him from death if I chose. For the present I must merely talk to him in my usual fashion. This I did, with an eagerness born of days without him. Save for an occasional faint fluttering of his sallow eyelids, Anra did not move, yet I felt that never before had he listened as intently, never before had he understood me as well. Now I remembered and told him all sorts of things that had escaped my memory or seemed too subtle for language. I talked on and on, haphazardly, chaotically, ranging swiftly from local gossip to world history, delving into myriad experiences and feelings, not all of them my own.

"Hours, perhaps days passed. At times my throat grew dry and he gave me drink, but I hardly dared pause for that, since I was appalled at the slight but unremitting change for the worse that was taking place in my twin and I had become possessed with the idea that my talking was the cord between life and Anra, that it created a channel between our bodies, across which my strength could flow to revive him.

"My eyes swam and blurred, my body shook, my voice ran the gamut of hoarseness down to an almost inaudible whisper. Despite my resolve I would have fainted, save that the Old Man held to my face burning aromatic herbs which caused me to come shudderingly awake.

"Finally I could no longer speak, but that was no release, as I continued to twitch my cracked lips and think on and on in a rushing feverish stream. It was as if I jerked and flung from the depths of my mind scraps of ideas from which Anra sucked the tiny life that remained to him.

"There was one persistent image—of a dying Hermaphroditus approaching Salmacis' pool, in which he would become one with the nymph.

"Farther and farther I ventured out along the talk-created channel between us, nearer and nearer I came to Anra's pale,

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delicate, cadaverous face, until, as with a despairing burst of effort I hurled my last strength to him, it loomed large as a green-shadowed ivory cliff falling to engulf me—"

Ahura's words broke off in a gasp of horror. The Mouser and Fafhrd and she stood still and stared ahead. For rearing up before them in the thickening mist, so near that they felt they had been ambushed, was a great chaotic structure of whitish, faintly yellowed stone, through whose narrow windows and wide-open door streamed a baleful greenish light, source of the mist's phosphorescent glow. Mist-magnified, the structure's twisted ramps and pinnacles, like a fluid face in a nightmare, pushed upward toward where the stars should have been.

9
The Castle Called Mist

WHAT happened next was so strange that I felt sure I had plunged from feverish consciousness into the cool retreat of a fanciful dream," Ahura continued as, having tethered their horses, they mounted a wide stairway toward that open door which mocked alike sudden rush and cautious reconnoitering. Her story went on with as calm and drugged a fatalism as their step-by-step advance. "I was lying on my back beside the three stones and watching my body move around the little basement. I was terribly weak, I could not stir a muscle. Idly, as one will in a dream, I studied my face. It seemed to be smiling in triumph, very foolishly I thought. But as I continued to study it, fear began to intrude. The face was mine, but there were unfamiliar quirks of expression. Then, becoming aware of my gaze, it grimaced contemptuously and turned and said something to the Old Man, who nodded matter-of-factly. The intruding fear engulfed me. With a tremendous effort I managed to roll my eyes downward and look at my real body, the one lying on the floor.

"It was Anra's."

They entered the doorway and found themselves in a huge, many-nooked and niched stone room—though seemingly no nearer the ultimate source of the green glow, except that here the misty air was bright with it. There were stone tables and benches and chairs scattered about, but the chief feature of the place was the mighty archway ahead, from which stone groinings curved upward in baffling profusion. Fafhrd's and the Mouser's eyes momentarily sought the keystone of the arch, both because of its great size and because there was an odd dark recess toward its top.

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The silence was portentous, making them feel uneasily for their swords. It was not merely that the luring music had ceased—here in the Castle Called Mist there was literally no sound, save what rippled out futilely from their own beating hearts. There was instead a fog-bound concentration that froze into the senses, as though they were inside the mind of a titanic thinker, or as if the stones themselves were entranced.

Then, since it seemed as unthinkable to wait in that silence as for lost hunters to stand motionless in deep winter cold, they passed under the archway and took at random an upward-leading ramp.

Ahura continued, "Helplessly I watched them make certain preparations. While Anra gathered some small bundles of manuscripts and clothing, the Old Man lashed together the three mortar-crusted stones.

"While he was still bending over the stones, my mother entered the room. Crying out, 'What have you done to him?' she threw herself down beside me and felt at me anxiously. The Old Man roughly jerked her back. She lay huddled against the wall, her eyes wide, her teeth chattering—especially when she saw Anra, in my body, grotesquely lift the lashed stones. Meanwhile the Old Man hoisted me, in my new, wasted form, to his shoulder, picked up the bundles, and ascended the short stair.

"We walked through the inner court, rose-strewn and filled with mother's perfumed, wine-splashed friends, who stared at us in befuddled astonishment, and so out of the house. It was night. Five slaves waited with a curtained litter in which the Old Man placed me. My last glimpse was of Mother's face, its paint tracked by tears, peering horrifiedly through the half open door."

THE ramp issued onto an upper level and they found themselves wandering aimlessly through a mazy series of rooms. There were metal doors with massy complex bolts whose drawing they dared not fathom. There was a disordered, high-shelved library; the corners were piled with sealed cannisters of greenish stone and age-verdigrised brass tablets. Another room exuded a fearful animal stench; upon its slippery floor they noted a sprinkling of short, incredibly thick black bristles. There was a door that was thrice as broad as it was high and its height hardly that of a man's knee. There was a window that let upon a blackness that was neither of mist nor of night, and yet seemed finite; peering in, Fafhrd could

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faintly see rusted iron handholds leading upward. The Mouser uncoiled his climbing rope to its full length and swung it around inside the window, without the hook striking anything.

Yet the strangest impression this ominously empty stronghold begot in them was also the subtlest, and one which each new room or twisting corridor heightened—a feeling of architectural inadequacy. It seemed impossible that the supports were equal to the vast weights of the great stone floors and ceilings, so impossible that they almost became convinced that there were buttresses and retaining walls they could not see, either invisible or existing in some other world altogether, as if the Castle Called Mist had only partially emerged from some unthinkable outside. That certain bolted doors seemed to lead where no space could be, added to this hinting.

They wandered through passages so distorted that, though they retained a precise memory of landmarks, they lost all sense of direction.

Finally Fafhrd said, "This gets us nowhere. Whatever we seek, whomever we wait for—Old Man or demon—it might as well be in that first room of the great archway."

The Mouser nodded as they turned back, and Ahura said, "At least we'll be at no greater disadvantage there. Ishtar, but the Old Man's rhyme is true! 'Each chamber is a slavering maw, each arch a toothy jaw.' I always greatly feared this place, but never thought to find a mazy den that sure as death has stony mind and stony claws.

"They never chose to bring me here, you see, and from the night I left our home in Anra's body, I was a living corpse, to be left or taken where they wished. They would have killed me, I think, at least there came a time when Anra would, except it was necessary that Anra's body have an occupant—or my rightful body when he was out of it, for Anra was able to re-enter his own body and walk about in it in this region of Ahriman. At such times I was kept drugged and helpless at the Lost City. I believe that something was done to his body at that time—the Old Man talked of making it invulnerable—for after I returned to it, I found it seeming both emptier and stonier than before."

Starting back down the ramp, the Mouser thought he heard from somewhere ahead, against the terrible silence, the faintest of windy groans.

I GREW to know my twin's body very well, for I was in it most of seven years in the tomb. Somewhere during that black period all fear and horror vanished

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—I had become habituated to death. For the first time in my life my will, my cold intelligence, had time to grow. Physically fettered, existing almost without sensation, I gained inward power. I began to see what I could never see before—Anra's weaknesses.

"For he could never cut me wholly off from him. The chain he had forged between our minds was too strong for that. No matter how far away he went, no matter what screens he raised up, I could always see into some sector of his mind, dimly, like a scene at the end of a long, narrow, shadowy corridor.

"I saw his pride—a silver-armored wound. I watched his ambition stalk among the stars as if they were jewels set on black velvet in his treasure house to be. I felt his choking hatred of the bland, miserly gods—almighty fathers who lock up the secrets of the universe, smile at our pleas, frown, shake their heads, forbid, chastise; and his groaning rage at the bonds of space and time, as if each cubit he could not see and tread upon were a sliver manacle on his wrist, as if each moment before or after his own life were a silver crucifying nail. I walked through the gale-blown halls of his loneliness and glimpsed the beauty that he cherished—shadowy, glittering forms that cut the soul like knives—and once I came upon the dungeon of his love, where no light came to show it was corpses that were fondled and bones kissed.

"Happily, for I was learning at long last to hate him, I noted how, though he possessed my body, he could not use it easily and bravely as I had. He could not laugh, or love, or dare. He must instead hang back, peer, purse his lips, withdraw."

More than halfway down the ramp, it seemed to the Mouser that the groan was repeated, louder, more whistlingly.

"He and the Old Man started on a new cycle of study and experience that took them, I think, to all corners of the world. Anxiously from my cramped vantage-point I watched their quest ripen and then, to my delight, rot. Their outstretched fingers just missed the next handhold in the dark. There was something that both of them lacked. Anra became bitter, blamed the Old Man for their lack of success. They quarreled.

"When I saw Anra's failure become final, I mocked him with my laughter, not of lips but of mind—it was then he would have killed me. But he dared not while I was in his own body, and I now had the power to bar him from that.

"Perhaps it was my faint thought-laughter that turned his

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desperate mind to you and to the secret of the laughter of the Elder Gods—that, and his need of magical aid in regaining his body. For a while then I almost feared he had found a new avenue of escape—or advance—until this morning before the tomb, with joy, I saw you spit on his offers, challenge, and, helped by my laughter, kill him. Now there is only the Old Man to fear."

Passing again under the massive multiple archway with its oddly recessed keystone, they heard the whistling groan once more repeated, and they made out an inner window set level with the floor, and in that window they saw a face that seemed to float bodyless on the thick fog. Its features defied recognition—it might have been a distillation of all the ancient, disillusioned faces in the world. There was no beard below the sunken cheeks.

Coming close as they dared, they saw that it was perhaps not entirely bodyless or without support. There was the ghostly suggestion of tatters of clothing or flesh trailing off, a pulsating sack that might have been a lung, and silver chains with hooks or claws.

Then the one eye remaining to that shameful fragment opened and fixed upon Ahura, and the shrunken lips twisted themselves into the caricature of a smile.

"Like you, Ahura," the Old Man Without a Beard piped eerily, "he sent me on an errand I did not want to run."

As one, moved by a fear they dared not formulate, Fafhrd and the Mouser and Ahura half turned round and peered over their shoulders at the mist-clogged doorway leading outside. For three, four heartbeats they peered. Then, faintly, they heard one of the horses whinny. Whereupon they turned fully round, but not before a dagger, sped by the yet unshaking hand of Fafhrd, had buried itself in the open eye of the tortured thing in the inner window.

Side by side they stood, Fafhrd wild-eyed, the Mouser taut, Ahura with the look of someone who, having successfully climbed a precipice, slips at the very summit.

A SLIM shadow mounted into the glow outside the doorway.

"Laugh!" Fafhrd hoarsely commanded Ahura. "Laugh!" He shook her, repeating the command.

Her head flopped from side to side, the cords in her neck jerked, her lips twitched, but from them came only a dry croaking. She grimaced despairingly.

"Yes," remarked a voice they all recognized, "there are times and places where laughter is an easily-blunted weapon—as

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harmless as the sword which this morning pierced me through."

Death-pale as always, the tiny blood-clot over his heart, his forehead crumpled in, his black garb travel-dusted, Anra Devadoris faced them.

"And so we come back to the beginning," he said slowly, "but now a wider circle looms ahead."

Fafhrd tried to speak, to laugh, but the words and laugter choked in his throat.

"Now you have learned something of my history and my power, as I intended you should," the adept continued. "You have had time to weigh and reconsider. I still await your answer."

This time it was the Mouser who sought to speak or laugh and failed.

For a moment the adept continued to regard them, smiling confidently. Then his gaze wandered beyond them. He frowned suddenly and strode forward, pushed past them, knelt by the inner window.

As soon as his back was turned Ahura tugged at the Mouser's sleeve, tried to whisper something—with no more success than one deaf and dumb.

They heard the adept sob, "He was my nicest."

The Mouser drew a dagger, prepared to steal on him from behind, but Ahura dragged him back, pointing in a very different direction.

The adept whirled on them. "Fools!" he cried, "have you no inner eye for the wonders of darkness, no sense of the grandeur of horror, no feeling for a quest beside which all other adventurings fade in nothingness, that you should destroy my greatest miracle—slay my dearest oracle? I let you come here to Mist, confident its mighty music and glorious vistas would win you to my view—and thus I am repaid. The jealous, ignorant powers ring me round—you are my great hope fallen. There were unfavorable portents as I walked from the Lost City. The white, idiot glow of Ormadz faintly dirtied the black sky. I heard in the wind the senile clucking of the Elder Gods. There was a fumbling abroad, as if even incompetent Ningauble, last and stupidest of the hunting pack, were catching up. I had a charm in reserve to thwart them, but it needed the Old Man to carry it. Now they close in for the kill. But there are still some moments of power left me and I am not wholly yet without allies. There are still those bound to me by such ties that they must answer me if I call upon them. You shall not see the end, if end there be." With that he lifted his voice in a great eerie shout, "Father!"

The echoes had not died before Fafhrd rushed at him, his great sword singing.

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The Mouser would have followed suit except that, just as he shook Ahura off, he realized at what she was so insistently pointing.

The recess in the keystone above the mighty archway.

Without hesitation he unslipped his climbing rope, and running lightly across the chamber, made a cast.

The hook caught in the recess.

Hand over hand he climbed up.

Behind him he heard the desperate skirl of swords, heard also another sound, far more distant and profound.

His hand gripped the lip of the recess, he pulled himself up and thrust in head and shoulders, steadying himself on hip and elbow. After a moment, with his free hand, he whipped out his dagger.

Inside, the recess was hollowed like a bowl. It was filled with a foul greenish liquid and incrusted with glowing minerals. At the bottom, covered by the liquid, were several objects—three of them rectangular, the others irregularly round and rhythmically pulsating.

He raised his dagger, but for the moment did not, could not, strike. There was too crushing a weight of things to be realized and remembered—what Ahura had told about the ritual marriage in her mother's family—her suspicion that, although she and Anra were born together, they were not children of the same father—how her Greek father had died—the strange affinity for stone the slave-physician had noted in Anra's body—what she had said about an operation performed on him—why a heart-thrust had not killed him—why his skull had cracked so hollowly and egg-shell easy—how he had never seemed to breathe—old legends of other sorcerors who had made themselves invulnerable by hiding their hearts—above all, the deep kinship all of them had sensed between Anra and this half-living castle—the black, man-shaped monolith in the Lost City—

HE saw Anra Devadoris, spitted on Fafhrd's blade, pushing himself closer along it, and Fafhrd desperately warding off Needle's thrusts with a dagger.

As if pinioned by a nightmare, he heard the clash of swords blotted out by a gargantuan stony clomping that seemed to be following their course up the mountain, like a pursuing earthquake—

The Castle Called Mist began to tremble, and still he could not strike—

Then, as if surging from that utmost rim beyond which the Elder Gods had retreated, relinquishing the world to younger deities, he heard a mighty, star-

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shaking laughter, and there was power in the laughter, and he knew the power was his to use.

With a downward sweep of his arm he sent his dagger plunging into the green liquid and tearing through the stone-crusted heart and brain and lungs and guts of Anra Devadoris.

The liquid foamed and boiled, the castle rocked until he was almost shaken from the niche, the laughter and stony clomping rose to a pandemonium.

Then, in an instant it seemed, all sound and movement ceased. The Mouser's muscles went weak. He half fell, half slid, to the floor. Looking about dazedly, making no attempt to rise, he saw Fafhrd wrench his sword from the fallen adept and totter back until his groping hand found the support of a table-edge, saw Ahura, still gasping from the laughter that had possessed her, go up and kneel beside her brother and cradle his crushed head on her knees.

* * *

Fafhrd shook himself and walked out into the darkness. The Mouser yawned and stretched himself, Ahura stirred, printed a kiss on the waxen face of her brother, lifted the trifling weight of his head from her lap, and laid it gently on the floor.

Presently Fafhrd returned, striding more briskly, with two jars of wine under his arm.

"Friends," he announced, "the moon's come out, and by its light this castle begins to look remarkably small. I think the mist must have been dusted with some green drug that made us see sizes wrong. We must have been drugged, I'll swear, for we never saw something that's standing plain as day at the bottom of the stairs with its foot on the first step—a black statue that's twin brother to the one in the Lost City."

The Mouser lifted his eyebrows. "The adept called out, 'Father,' did he not? And if we went back to the Lost City . . . ?" he asked.

"Why," said Fafhrd, "we might find that those fool Persian farmers, who admitted hating the thing, had knocked down the statue there, and broken it up, and hidden the pieces." He was silent for a moment. Then, "Here's wine," he rumbled, "to sluice the green drug from our throats."

They all three sat on a table-edge and passed the two jars endlessly round.

Their rivalry forgotten, at least for the present, Fafhrd and the Mouser persuaded Ahura to help them determine whether her brother's spells were altogether broken. A moderate number of kisses and hugs demonstrated this clearly.

Had any of them been watch-

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ing the corpse of Anra Devadoris, they would have seen a slight twitching of the lower jaw. At last the mouth came open, and out leapt a tiny black mouse and began a squeaking scurry toward the wall. A wine jar, hurled by Fafhrd, shattered on the crack into which it shot; Fafhrd had seen, or thought he had seen, the untoward place from which the mouse had come.

"Mice in his mouth," he hiccupped. "What dirty habits for a pleasant young man! A nasty, degrading business, this thinking oneself an adept."

"I am reminded," said the Mouser, "of what a witch told me about adepts. She said that, if an adept chances to die, his soul is reincarnated in a mouse. If, as a mouse, he managed to kill a rat, his soul passes over into a rat. As a rat, he must kill a cat; as a cat, a wolf; as a wolf, a panther; and, as a panther, a man. Then he can recommence his adeptry. Of course, it seldom happens that anyone gets all the way through the sequence and in any case it takes a very long time. Trying to kill a rat is enough to satisfy a mouse with mousedom."

Fafhrd solemnly denied the possibility of any such foolery, and Ahura cried until she decided that being a mouse would interest rather than dishearten her peculiar brother. More wine was drunk from the remaining jar.

The Mouser said, "Our quest's done. I'm for Tyre."

Fafhrd said, "I'm for Lankhmar. Or is that a dream?"

The Mouser shrugged. "Mayhap Tyre is one. Lankhmar sounds as good."

Ahura said, "Could a girl go?"

A great blast of wind, cold and pure, blew away the last lingering of mist. Through the doorway they saw, outspread, the self-consistent stars.

THE END

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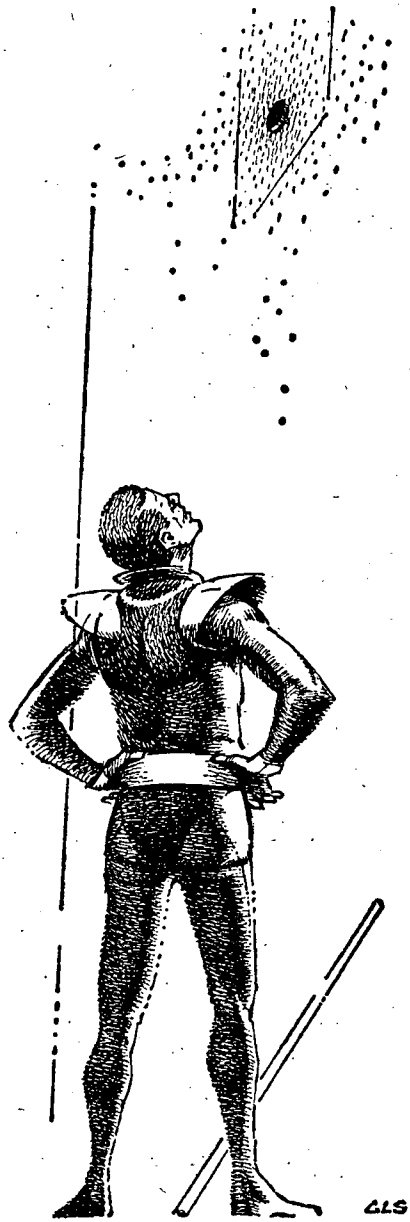

The planet would belong to the winner of the war. So thought the Citysiders and the Aleuts. But Grandsir wondered just what the spoils would turn out to be.

TO THE

By LEO P. KELLEY

IT was Cecily who finally found him far away from Cityside, roaming the blue-hazed hills and he laughed when she asked him what he was doing and answered that he was remembering all the wine drunk and all the women forgotten.

Cecily patiently puckered her lips. "You're to come Cityside, Grandsir. Papa says *right now!*"

Cecily was nine. She skip-stepped along ahead of him, her coppery hair bouncing against her thin shoulders, like a bright balloon caught and teased by some whimsical wind. "Hurry, Grandsir!" she called back to him. "Or we'll miss the war!"

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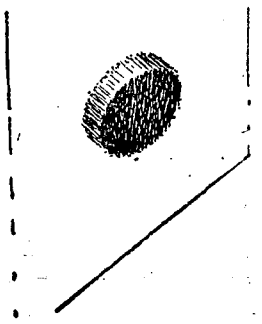

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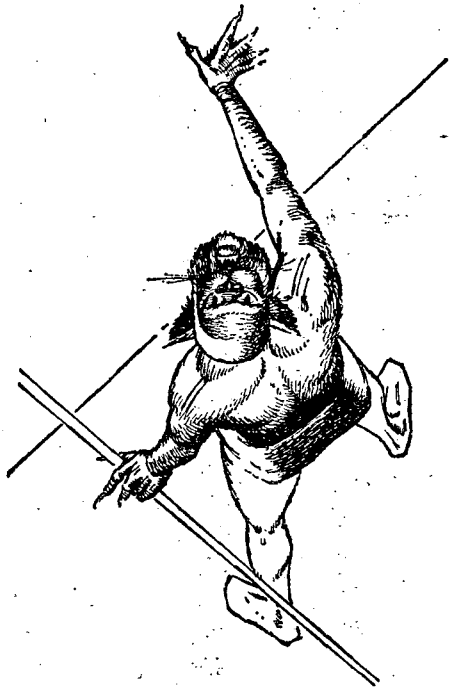

The words made him wince, coming as they did so thoughtlessly, so recklessly, from such young lips. Too soon, he thought. They learn the facts of life—and death—too soon.

He followed her through the ripe foliage and the tall trees that graced what little was left of primitive Aleutia Major, holding aside branches heavy with scarlet flowers and treading through the inches high yellow grass that met his aging feet like an old friend. Occasionally, they passed an Aleutian village where the females wove their blankets for the winter to come and, their voices hushing, whis-

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pered of the war to be fought this very night.

He ignored the chittering of the small salabeasts scampering from branch to branch above his head, thinking of many things as he followed his granddaughter. Mostly he thought of man. Of his speedy journey out from Earth to the moon and on to the planets and then to the distant stars in a score of galaxies, sowing his seed and prospering, with barely time to unpack the clothescase he carried with him on his wanderings.

Cecily took his hand as they emerged from the dim forest to stare up at the proud towers of Cityside thrusting spaceward before their eyes, humiliating the jungle of Aleutia Major with a mute and orderly scorn for all things untamed and wild.

Cecily led him like a patient dog through the guarded gates in the West Wall and along the geometrically precise squares of Cityside to their own building. They lifted together in the pneumatic chamber to the ninety-third level and the one-room homicile that sheltered his son, Lawrence, his daughter-in-law, Martha, Cecily and little Eddie. And himself: Martin Langley, Centenarian.

"Grandsir!" Martha chided, shaking a finger in his face as he entered in Cecily's breezy wake. "The very idea wandering off when you know well enough it's Tuesday."

TUESDAY. The day of the war with the Aleutians. He sank wearily into a comfitchair, lit a fumette, sighed and dropped the match. It missed the disposit and fell to the floor. Before he could retrieve it, the floor vents sucked it out of sight. He raised his eyes as Martha spoke patronizingly.

"If you must smoke, Grandsir, at least be careful. Fire, you know." She switched on the dialagarden and sickish perfume filled the room.

Larry came into the room, a razormatic nick red on his chin. "Hi, dad. Ready for the cleanroom?"

He was, he realized, being told to go and wash. He smudged out his fumette in the disposit. Playing the game by the unwritten rules they all understood, he nodded, rose and went into the cleanroom, shutting the door quietly behind him. It was the only place in the homicile where it was quiet enough to think.

Dialagardens, he thought. Jonquils, he remembered. And he yearned for the sight of spring mud running with rain. But jonquils and rain had no place in the spotless, clockwork technology that was Cityside. Did he?

He stood beneath the needling spray of the sanishower and let it

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whisper to him in voices he recognized and wanted to forget.

"Cityside," the sanispray hissed, in the voice of Controller Linning who had spoken so convincingly at the meeting of the Preparedness Block just two weeks ago.

"Cityside must expand," Controller Linning had decreed. "We have made most magnanimous offers to the Aleutians but they persist in stubbornly refusing all grants-in-aid and proper adjustments."

"What about it, B'wkin?" General Cole snapped to the head of the Aleutian delegation sitting at the far end of the table.

B'wkin listened as the interpreter translated. His golden eyes saucered, turned from face to face. He spoke at last and the humans listened to the translation through their transmits.

"We are of the land," B'wkin explained, "and know no other way. The godlings, in ages lost to memory, gave us the land and taught us to use its fruits and to be grateful. Without the land we are not a people but merely zephyrs, the prey of every wind and at the mercy of sudden storms. Take from us the land that loves us and you take away our father, mother and—our life."

"But," sputtered General Cole, "we will pay!"

B'wkin smiled sadly and the pain in his face sent a gust of shame swirling through the council room, chilling its occupants.

"The chair recognizes Centenarian Martin Langley," Controller Linning said quickly.

"Perhaps we could build higher," he had then suggested mildly.

"Really, Langley," a young architect simpered. "We must consider the limits of the building materials. The residual stress, not to mention metal fatigue, are—."

"Maybe our expanding population could be encouraged to colonize Aleutia Minor—head out to some of the other stars, I mean," he proposed and felt the eyes of the human delegation knife him. "There are new frontiers throughout the galaxies."

"*Here* is *our* new frontier!" barked General Cole, interrupting. "Time enough for that when there's no more land left here. Cityside's demands must be met. And met now! We appreciate your interest, Langley," Cole went on more calmly. "But I feel I must remind you that your position as counselor here rests solely upon your status as one of the first colonists on Aleutia Major and I respectfully suggest that your venerable age may leave you prone to ignore—even discount—the remarkable progress Cityside has made—and continues to make."

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"Possibly—," he began and lapsed into silence, intimidated by the sight of the young men shifting noisily in their chairs and drumming angry fingers on the council table. He sat down.

A vote was taken. It would have been unanimous except for his dissenting ballot. War was declared. The arrangements for its conduct were promptly made.

LATER, as he left the meeting alone, he felt the sweat trickle down beneath his arms. He felt the weight of all his hundred and twelve years as he rode down to street level and he silently denounced the successful science of geriatrics and the cowardice that had not let him speak more loudly, more forcefully, more eloquently. He thought of himself as a man standing at the end of a long road that had been marked with vague signposts which read *maybe* and *perhaps* and *possibly*. Weak weapons, these words were but clumsy caterpillars that now held no hope of ever becoming butterflys. He was old, he thought. That was the trouble. Too old to fight Cityside or the inevitable and weren't they the same damn thing when you came right down to it. Go back to your books that aren't practical, he advised himself. And your dreams that aren't utilitarian. Your day is done. See the new sun rising. Try to forget that growing old means growing gutless.

When he emerged at last from the cleanroom, they were all waiting for him with undisguised impatience.

"Wanna bet we'll win?" Eddie piped at him, daring him to disagree.

He reached out too late to touch the boy's head as he fled through the door with Cecily right behind him.

Outside, they melted into the throng threading its eager way toward the coliseum in the center of Cityside. When they arrived, they handed their plastoid coins to the android ticket taker whose electronic voice directed them to their pallets. Inside, they lay back on the pallets, side by side, and stared up at the mammoth screen which spanned the soaring ceiling of the coliseum.

Martin raised himself on his elbows and looked about the crowded and noisy amphitheater. Off to the left and occupying equal space, several thousand Aleutians lay quietly on their pallets, waiting. Souvenir vendors scurried up and down the aisles between the pallets selling miniature homiciles which flooded with light at the flick of a switch.

"Larry," Martha exclaimed, "look, aren't they just the cutest things ever?"

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Larry smiled indulgently and hailed a vendor. He bought two for Cecily and Eddie who waved them merrily about, laughing and peering into the lighted windows at the small human figures inside.

Suddenly, the lights dimmed. A voice came over the loudspeaker, jovial and jesting. A moment later, the owner of the voice appeared in three dimensions and a blaze of color on the ceiling screen.

"Welcome to our special closed-circuit telefest *Win the War*, ladies and gentlemen and all Aleutians," the announcer cried gaily, spilling sunbeams and sugar down on the assembled crowd.

THE humans broke into applause and clapped until their palms were red. The Aleutians remained silent, their furred bodies motionless, their golden eyes gleaming. Like them, Martin, his hands resting at his sides, stared up at the cherubic smile of the announcer.

"Two minutes to go," the announcer exclaimed. "And here he is now, the man you've all been waiting for, a man you all know and love—Carlie Nickson."

Applause.

Carlie Nickson danced on and into the center of the screen, beaming and holding up his hands to stem the applause. Silence fell. "Who—," he began and paused dramatically. The audience, delighted, drew its collective breath. "Who," he repeated, "will *Win the War?*"

"We will, we will, we will!" responded the humans in a rhythmic chant and didn't care that the Aleutians remained as silent as before.

The hands of Carlie Nickson flew up again. In a hushed voice, he spoke to the thousands watching him on the screen. "As you all know, we are about to witness the war with the Aleutians. If we —if Cityside wins, the remaining Aleutian territory becomes the property of Cityside, Unlimited and new homiciles will spring up everywhere. Present crowded conditions will end in a burst of building! If, on the other hand, the Aleutians win, the land remains in their possession for as long as their race survives."

"Larry," Martha whispered. "We'll win, won't we?"

Larry reached out and patted her hand, his eyes glued to the screen.

"We are both civilized races," Nickson purred and Martin made himself listen. "The old gives way to the new and progress—that priceless commodity that has raised us from the ancient sea-slime of Earth and sent us searching among the stars—must be served. No bullets or broadsides will be fired here to-

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night, I assure you. No armies will plunder or tear at each other's throats. We have left that far behind us on the thorny path to intergalactic civilization. One man against one Aleutian. That's what you've come to see tonight, friends, and that's what you're going to see. If a little death leaks in, well, that's the price one of our two brave contestants must pay if he loses the war."

Martin, to ward off the waves of nausea that threatened to drown him, turned his mind loose to roam again in the tilting hills and valleys of Aleutia where flowers bruised him with their beauty and the reds and golds of an Earth autumn were a constant thing on the plains and beside the rivers.

The land, he mused, was like a part of each Aleutian. More than a leg and stronger than an arm, it nourished its people on its verdant breast and the Aleutians, grateful to the land that loved them, sang songs:

Like a garden of lakes
and a haven of mists that
hold close the people
are you, our land, and fair to
look upon.
Your men, mighty as
mountains,
and your maidens, lovely in
the dawn,
shall sing your praises.

"And now, friends don't go way," Carlie Nickson cried. "After this brief message, we will see who will *win the war!*"

The remembered song faded as Martin felt his mind being invaded by the muted music of the advertising message which depicted life in a lovely little pastel citysite complete with sterilight and every ceiling teletaped, according to the chorus of female voices harmonizing in almost orgiastic ecstacy somewhere off camera.

"And now the time has come!" declared Carlie Nickson, returning and stepping forward until his grinning face filled the screen. He turned and watched with the audience as two immense cubicles glided without visible aid onto the stage. Carlie beckoned and held out welcoming hands as an Earthman and an Aleutian came center stage. Carlie made the handshaking last a full, elaborate minute.

"On my right," he intoned solemnly, when the ceremony was completed to his satisfaction," "is B'wkin who will represent the Aleutians and on my left is Commander Thomas McLain, battling tonight for Cityside."

Cheers from the humans. The Aleutians made the sign of good fortune with their six-padded paws.

Carlie escorted the contestants to their cubicles. He sealed the doors himself. "The warriors are invisible to each other now," he

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told the audience. He winked reassuringly just before his image faded and the cameras picked up the interiors of the cubicles and their occupants.

MARTIN found that he was interested in spite of himself. Like the thousands of others in the coliseum, he examined the contents of the rooms. In each room, a gleaming unicycle lay on the floor beside a metal pole. A red button glared high on one of the walls in each room, too high for either McLain or B'wkin to reach, although McLain was already standing on his toes, measuring the distance to the button with his eyes.

"He should stand up on that wheel," Cecily whispered, enthralled.

But B'wkin was already doing just that. The button remained out of reach. He dismounted, picked up the metal pole and climbed back on the unicycle, holding the pole in a quivering paw.

The Aleutians, watching him, mewled anxiously as B'wkin slammed his metal pole against the red button.

Nothing happened. B'wkin climbed down and sat back on his haunches, his eyes lidding thoughtfully.

In the opposite cubicle, McLain sprang up and gripped the lid of the tub. He managed to haul himself up sufficiently to look down into its depths. He dropped to the floor, panting with the effort, and picked up the metal pole. He ran his index finger along the groove he discovered in the slender length of metal. Methodically, he placed the rod at a forty-five degree angle against the tub. He mounted his unicycle, swayed, and fell to the floor with a resounding crash.

Someone in the audience giggled.

On the third try, McLain mastered the unicycle and rode it somewhat awkwardly about the interior of his cubicle. He tried to pedal up the sloping road. At last, following several failures, he hit it right and sped up the sloping rod and went over into the tub of water.

And hit the powerful springboard he had discovered in the base of the tub.

Martin felt his heartbeat quicken as McLain skyrocketed into the air toward the tantalizing red button. McLain slammed his fist against it, pressing with all his strength, as the cameras focused on the rigid tendons showing in his neck.

Again nothing happened. Except that McLain fell to the floor.

B'wkin discovered the groove in the rod. Instead of using it as had McLain, he bent the rod in three places until it formed a

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two-dimensional square. He then placed the unicycle in the groove on top of the bent rod. Gingerly, he placed one paw on the square, steadying the unicycle as he did so. Then the second paw. The rod held. He was astride the unicycle and balancing precariously. He reached for the button and pushed it.

Silence.

"Win the war!" Cecily shrieked, her child-shrill voice piercing the breathless quiet.

The humans took up the cry, chanting, "Win the war! Win the war! Cityside! Cityside! Win! Win! Win!"

B'wkin located the springboard hidden in the tub of water but his attempts to use it succeeded only in drenching himself and the floor and walls of his cubicle.

McLain suddenly mounted his unicycle again. He pedaled up the grooved rod once more, plunged into the tub and soared up as the cameras faithfully recorded the smile that was almost a sneer on his handsome face. This time, instead of pushing the button, he *pulled* it.

THE audience gasped as a blinding crackle of electricity erupted in B'wkin's cubicle and darted along the water-soaked floor and up the walls. In an instant, B'wkin vanished in a furnace of flame.

As the humans cheered themselves hoarse, the soft tribal lament for the dying and the dead floated up from the assembled Aleutians.

Martin realized that the chant was for more than the ridiculous death of B'wkin. As the Aleutians mourned, he found himself muttering words he thought he had long ago forgotten, so foul were they.

He was already half way to the exit when Carlie Nickson's syrupy tones smothered him.

"—and the peace treaty will be signed in the morning. Building will begin an hour later. Here are the bulldozers, friends, ready for duty."

A still shot of scores of bulldozers lined up just outside the gates of Cityside flashed on the screen. Martin stared. He heard Nickson announce that Commander Thomas McLain would have the honor of driving the first bulldozer into the forests of Aleutia. McLain would also be given five thousand acres of virgin Aleutian land to do with as he wished, Nickson declared piously, his hand resting on McLain's massive shoulder. McLain blushed boyishly. The audience roared its pleasure and approval.

Martin fled out into the street. He ran for a block but he could not maintain the pace. He covered the remaining distance to his goal at a brisk walk. When he

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reached the West Wall, he dashed past the watchman who called out after him, "We won!"

"Did we?" Martin snorted.

He made his way to the thick line of bulldozers and climbed up unnoticed onto the seat of the nearest one. He fiddled with the controls, swearing savagely. Suddenly, the bulldozer leaped to life, carrying him forward like a raging metal bull. It's rage was no match for Martin's own.

He hurtled through the undergrowth and grimaced as the crimson blossoms fell beneath the metal treads of the bulldozer. He looked behind him at the flowers, clearly visible in the relentless light spilling out from Cityside. Crushed, they lay like a blanket of blood on the broken ground. With them, he knew, would die the folkways of a people and one day the people would awake and find that they had forgotten the blue hills and the dew glistening icy in the dawn. Cityside would swallow them and not even belch.

As he rode the shuddering machine, punishing the land, he punished himself. He thought of his action as a kind of atonement, a penance for the cowardice that had weakened his voice and his arguments at the meeting of the Preparedness Block and led him to so soft a surrender.

(*Continued on page 96*)

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Master of Chaos

By MICHAEL MOORCOCK

Illustrator FINLAY

At the world's edge, the mists of Chaos swirled. Only a man whose weakness lay in his own strength could conquer the demons of Kaneloon.

FROM the glassless window of the stone tower it was possible to see the wide river winding off between loose, brown banks, through the heaped terrain of solid green copses which blended very gradually into the mass of the forest proper. And from out of the forest, the cliff rose, grey and light green, up and up, the rock darkening, lichen-covered, to merge with the lower, and even more massive, stones of the castle. It was the castle which dominated the countryside in three directions, drawing the eye from river, rock or forest. Its walls were high and of thick granite, with towers; a dense field of towers, grouped so as to shadow one another.

Aubec of Malador marvelled and wondered how human builders could ever have constructed it, save by sorcery. Brooding and mysterious, the castle seemed to have a defiant air, for it stood on the very edge of the world.

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At this moment the lowering sky cast a strange, deep yellow light against the western sides of the towers, intensifying the blackness untouched by it. Huge billows of blue sky rent the general racing greyness above, and mounds of red cloud crept through to blend and produce more and subtler colorings. Yet, though the sky was impressive, it could not take the gaze away from the ponderous series of man-made crags that were Castle Kaneloon.

Earl Aubec of Malador did not turn from the window until it was completely dark outside; forest, cliff and castle but shadowy tones against the overall blackness. He passed a heavy, knotted hand over his almost bald scalp and thoughtfully went towards the heap of straw which was his intended bed.

The straw was piled in a niche created by a buttress and the outer wall and the room was well-lighted by Malador's lantern. But the air was cold as he lay down on the straw with his hand close to the two-handed broadsword of prodigious size. This was his only weapon. It looked as if it had been forged for a giant —Malador was virtually that himself—with its wide crosspiece and heavy, stone-encrusted hilt and five-foot blade, smooth and broad. Beside it was Malador's old, heavy armor, the casque balanced on top with its somewhat tattered black plumes waving slightly in a current of air from the window.

Malador slept.

HIS dreams, as usual, were turbulent; of mighty armies surging across blazing landscapes, curling banners bearing the blazons of a hundred nations, forests of shining lance-tips, seas of tossing helmets, the brave, wild blasts of the war-horns, the clatter of hooves and the songs and cries and shouts of soldiers. These were dreams of earlier times, of his youth when, for Queen Eloarde of Lormyr, he had conquered all the Southern nations—almost to the edge of the world. Only Kaneloon, on the very edge, had he not conquered and this because no army would follow him there.

For one of so martial an appearance, these dreams were surprisingly unwelcome, and Malador woke several times that night, shaking his head in an attempt to rid himself of them.

He would rather have dreamed of Eloarde, though she was the cause of his restlessness, but he saw nothing of her in his sleep; nothing of her soft, black hair that billowed around her pale face, nothing of her green eyes and red lips and her proud, disdainful posture. Eloarde had assigned him to this quest and he

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had not gone willingly, though he had no choice, for as well as his mistress she was also his Queen. The Queen's Champion was traditionally her lover—and it was unthinkable to Earl Aubec that any other condition should exist. It was his place, as Champion of Lormyr, to obey and go forth from her palace to seek Castle Kaneloon alone and conquer it and declare it part of her Empire, so that it could be said Queen Eloarde' s domain stretched from the Dragon Sea to World's Edge.

NOTHING lay beyond World's Edge—nothing save the swirling stuff of unformed Chaos which stretched away from the Cliffs of Kaneloon for eternity, roiling and broiling, multicolored, full of monstrous half-shapes—for Earth alone was Lawful and constituted of ordered matter, drifting in the sea of Chaos-stuff as it had done for aeons.

In the morning, Earl Aubec of Malador extinguished the lantern which he had allowed to remain alight, drew greaves and hauberk on to him, placed his black-plumed helm upon his head, put his broadsword over his shoulder and sallied out of the stone tower which was all that remained whole of some ancient edifice.

His leathern-shod feet stumbled over stones that seemed partially dissolved, as if Chaos had once lapped here instead of against the towering Cliffs of Kaneloon. That, of course, was quite impossible, since Earth's boundaries were known to be constant.

Castle Kaneloon had seemed closer the night before and that, he now realized, was because it was so huge. He followed the river, his feet sinking in the loamy soil, the great branches of the trees shading him from the increasingly hot sun as he made his way towards the cliffs. Kaneloon was now out of sight, high above him. Every so often he used his sword as an axe to clear his way through the places where the foliage was particularly thick.

He rested several times, drinking the cold water of the river and mopping his face and head. He was unhurried, he had no wish to visit Kaneloon, he resented the interruption to his life with Eloarde which he thought he had earned. Also, he too had a superstitious dread of the mysterious castle, which was said to be inhabited only by one human occupant—the Dark Lady, a sorceress without mercy who commanded a legion of demons and other Chaos-creatures.

He reached the cliffs at midday and regarded the path leading upwards with a mixture of wari-

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ness and relief. He had expected to have to scale the cliffs. He was not one, however, to take a difficult route where an easy one presented itself, so he looped a cord around his sword and slung it over his back, since it was too long and cumbersome to carry at his side. Then, still in bad humor, he began to climb the twisting path.

The lichen-covered rocks were evidently ancient, contrary to the speculations of certain Lormyrian philosophers who asked why Kaneloon had only been heard of a few generations since. Malador believed in the general answer to this question—that explorers had never ventured this far until fairly recently. He glanced back down the path and saw the tops of the trees below him, their foliage moving slightly in the breeze. The tower in which he'd spent the night was just visible in the distance and, beyond that, he knew, there was no civilization, no outpost of Man for many days' journey North, East or West—can Chaos lay to the South. He had never been so close to the edge of the world before and wondered how the sight of unformed matter would affect his brain.

At length he clambered to the top of the cliff and stood, arms akimbo, staring up at Castle Kaneloon which soared a mile away, its highest towers hidden in the clouds, its immense walls rooted on the rock and stretching away, limited on both sides only by the edge of the cliff. And, on the other side of the cliff, Malador watched the churning, leaping Chaos-substance, predominantly grey, blue, brown and yellow at this moment, though its colors changed constantly, spew like the sea-spray a few feet from the castle.

He became filled with a feeling of such indescribable profundity that he could only remain in this position for a long while, completely overwhelmed by a sense of his own insignificance. It came to him, eventually, that if anyone did dwell in the Castle Kaneloon, then they must have a robust mind or else must be insane, and then he sighed and strode on towards his goal, noting that the ground was perfectly flat, without blemish, green, obsidian and reflecting imperfectly the dancing Chaos-stuff from which he averted his eyes as much as he could.

Kaneloon had many entrances, all dark and unwelcoming, and had they all not been of regular size and shape they might have been so many cave-mouths.

Malador paused before choosing which to take, and then walked with outward purposefulness towards one. He went into blackness which appeared to stretch away forever. It was cold;

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it was empty and he was alone.

HE was soon lost. His footsteps made no echo, which was unexpected; then the blackness began to give way to a series of angular outlines, like the walls of a twisting corridor—walls which did not reach the unsensed roof, but ended several yards above his head. It was a labyrinth, a maze. He paused and looked back and saw with horror that the maze wound off in many directions though he was sure he had followed a straight path from the outside.

For an instant, his mind became diffused and madness threatened to engulf him, but he battened it down, unslung his sword, shivering. Which way? He pressed on, unable to tell, now, whether he went forward or backward.

The madness lurking in the depths of his brain filtered out and became fear and, immediately following the sensation of fear, came the shapes. Swift-moving shapes, darting from several different directions, gibbering, fiendish, utterly horrible.

One of these creatures leapt at him and he struck at it with his blade. It fled, but seemed unwounded. Another came and another and he forgot his panic as he smote around him, driving them back until all had fled. He paused and leaned, panting, on his sword. Then, as he stared around him, the fear began to flood back into him and more creatures appeared—creatures with wide, blazing eyes and clutching talons, creatures with malevolent faces, mocking him, creatures with half-familiar faces, some recognizable as those of old friends and relatives, yet twisted into horrific parodies. He screamed and ran at them, whirling his huge sword, slashing, hacking at them, rushing past one group to turn a bend in the labyrinth and encounter another.

Malicious laughter coursed through the twisting corridors, following him and preceding him as he ran. He stumbled and fell against a wall. At first the wall seemed of solid stone, then, slowly it became soft and he sank through it, his body lying half in one corridor, half in another. He hauled himself through, still on hands and knees, looked up and saw Eloarde, but an Eloarde whose face grew old as he watched.

"I am mad," he thought. *"is this reality or fantasy—or both?"*

He reached out a hand, *"Eloarde!"*

She vanished but was replaced by a crowding horde of demons. He raised himself to his feet and flailed around him with his

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blade, but they skipped just outside his range and he roared at them as he advanced. Momentarily, whilst he thus exerted himself, the fear left him again and, with the disappearance of the fear, so the visions vanished until he realized that the fear preceded the manifestations and he tried to control it.

He almost succeeded, forcing himself to relax, but it welled up again and the creatures bubbled out of the walls, their shrill voices full of malicious mirth.

This time he did not attack them with his sword, but stood his ground as calmly as he could and concentrated upon his own mental condition. As he did so, the creatures began to fade away and then the walls of the labyrinth dissolved and it seemed to him that he stood in a peaceful valley, calm and idyllic. Yet, hovering close to his consciousness, he seemed to see the walls of the labyrinth faintly outlined, and disgusting shapes moving here and there along the many passages.

He realized that the vision of the valley was as much an illusion as the labyrinth and, with this conclusion, both valley and labyrinth faded and he stood in the enormous hall of a castle which could only be Kaneloon.

The hall was unoccupied, though well-furnished, and he could not see the source of the light, which was bright and even. He strode towards a table, on which were heaped scrolls, and his feet made a satisfying echo. Several great metal-studded doors led off from the hall, but for the moment he did not investigate them, intent on studying the scrolls and seeing if they could help him unravel Kaneloon's mystery.

He propped his sword against the table and took up the first scroll.

It was a beautiful thing of red vellum, but the black letters upon it meant nothing to him and he was astounded for, though dialects varied from place to place, there was only one language in all the lands of the Earth. Another scroll bore different symbols still, and a third he unrolled carried a series of highly stylised pictures which were repeated here and there so that he guessed they formed some kind of alphabet. Disgusted, he flung the scroll down, picked up his sword, drew an immense breath and shouted:

"Who dwells here? Let them know that Aubec, Earl of Malador, Champion of Lormyr and Conqueror of the South claims this castle in the name of Queen Eloarde, Empress of all the Southlands!"

In shouting these familiar words, he felt somewhat more comfortable, but he received no

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reply. He lifted his casque a trifle and scratched his neck. Then he picked up his sword, balanced it over his shoulder, and made for the largest door.

Before he reached it, it sprang open and a huge, manlike thing with hands like grappling irons grinned at him.

HE took a pace backwards and then another until, seeing that the thing did not advance, stood his ground observing it.

It was a foot or so taller than he, with oval, multi-facetted eyes that, by their nature, seemed blank. Its face was angular and had a grey, metallic sheen. Most of its body was comprised of burnished metal, jointed in the manner of armor. Upon its head was a tight-fitting hood, studded with brass. It had about it an air of tremendous and insensate power, though it did not move.

"A golem!" Malador exclaimed, for it seemed to him that he remembered such man-made creatures from legends. "What sorcery created *you!*"

The golem did not reply, but its hands—which were in reality comprised of four spikes of metal apiece—began slowly to flex themselves; and still the golem grinned.

This thing, Malador knew, did not have the same amorphous quality of his earlier visions. This was solid, this was real and strong, and even Malador's manly strength, however much he exerted it, could not defeat such a creature. Yet neither could he turn away.

With a scream of metal joints, the golem entered the hall and stretched its burnished hands towards the earl.

Malador could attack or flee, and fleeing would be senseless. He attacked.

His great sword clasped in both hands, he swung it sideways at the golem's torso, which seemed to be its weakest point. The golem lowered an arm and the sword shuddered against metal with a mighty clang that set the whole of Malador's body quaking. He stumbled backwards. Remorselessly, the golem followed him.

Malador looked back and searched the hall in the hope of finding a weapon more powerful than his sword, but saw only shields of an ornamental kind upon the wall to his right. He turned and ran to the wall, wrenching one of the shields from its place and slipping it on to his arm. It was an oblong thing, very light and comprising several layers of cross-grained wood. It was inadequate, but it made him feel a trifle better as he whirled again to face the golem.

The golem advanced, and Malador thought he noticed some-

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thing familiar about it, just as the demons of the labyrinth had seemed familiar, but the impression was only vague. Kaneloon's weird sorcery was affecting his mind, he decided.

The creature raised the spikes on its right arm and aimed a swift blow at Malador's head. He avoided it, putting up his sword as protection. The spikes clashed against the sword and then the left arm pistoned forward, driving at Malador's stomach. The shield stopped this blow, though the spikes pierced it deeply. He yanked the buckler off the spikes, slashing at the golem's leg-joints as he did so.

Still staring into the middle-distance, with apparently no real interest in Malador, the golem advanced like a blind man as the earl turned and leapt on to the table, scattering the scrolls. Now he brought his huge sword down upon the golem's skull and the brass studs sparked and the hood and head beneath it was dented. The golem staggered and then grasped the table, heaving it off the floor so that Malador was forced to leap to the ground. This time he made for door and tugged at its latch-ring, but the door would not open.

His sword was chipped and blunted. He put his back to the door as the golem reached him and brought its metal hand down on the top edge of the shield. The shield shattered and a dreadful pain shot up Malador's arm. He lunged at the golem, but he was unused to handling the big sword in this manner and the stroke was clumsy.

Malador knew that he was doomed. Force and fighting skill were not enough against the golem's insensate strength. At the golem's next blow he swung aside, but was caught by one of its spike-fingers which ripped through his armor and drew blood, though at that moment he felt no pain.

He scrambled up, shaking away the grip and fragments of wood which remained of the shield, grasping his sword firmly.

"The soulless demon has no weak spot," he thought, *"and, since it has no true intelligence, it cannot be appealed to. What would a golem fear?"*

The answer was simple. The golem would only fear something as strong or stronger than itself.

He must use cunning.

HE ran for the upturned table with the golem after him, leapt over the table and wheeled as the golem stumbled but did not, as he'd hoped, fall. However, the golem was slowed by its encounter and Aubec took advantage of this to rush for the door through which the golem had

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entered. It opened. He was in a twisting corridor, darkly shadowed, not unlike the labyrinth he had first found in Kaneloon. The door closed but he could find nothing to bar it with. He ran up the corridor as the golem tore the door open and came lumbering swiftly after him.

The corridor writhed about in all directons and, though he could not always see the golem, he could hear it and had the sickening fear that he would turn a corner at some stage and run straight into it. He did not—but he came to a door and, upon opening it and passing through it, found himself again in the hall of Castle Kaneloon.

He almost welcomed this familiar sight as he heard the golem, its metal parts screeching, continue to come after him. He needed another shield, but the part of the hall in which he now found himself had no wall-shields—only a large, round mirror of bright, clear-polished metal. It would be too heavy to be much use, but he seized it, tugging it from its hook. It fell with a clang and he hauled it up, dragging it with him as he stumbled away from the golem which had emerged into the room once more.

Using the chains by which the mirror had hung, he gripped it before him and, as the golem's speed increased and the monster rushed upon him, he raised this makeshift shield.

The golem shrieked.

MALADOR was astounded. The monster stopped dead and cowered away from the mirror. Malador pushed it towards the golem and the thing turned its back and fled, with a metallic howl, through the door it had entered by.

Relieved and puzzled, Malador sat down on the floor and studied the mirror. There was certainly nothing magical about it, though its quality was good. He grinned and said aloud:

"The creature *is* afraid of something. It is afraid of itself!"

He threw back his head and laughed loudly in his relief. Then he frowned. "Now to find the sorcerers who created him and take vengeance on them!" He pushed himself to his feet, twisted the chains of the mirror more securely about his arm and went to another door, concerned lest the golem complete its circuit of the maze and return through the door. This door would not budge, so he lifted his sword and hacked at the latch for a few moments until it gave. He strode into a well-lit passage with what appeared to be another room at its far end—the door open.

A musky scent came to his

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nostrils as he progressed along the passage—the scent that reminded him of Eloarde and the comforts of Lormyr.

When he reached the circular chamber, he saw that it was a bedroom—a woman's bedroom full of the perfume he had smelled in the passage. He controlled the direction his mind took, thought of loyalty and Lormyr, and went to another door which led off from the room. He lugged it open and discovered a stone staircase winding upwards. This he mounted, passing windows that seemed glazed with emerald or ruby, beyond which shadow-shapes flickered so that he knew he was on the side of the castle overlooking Chaos.

The staircase seemed to lead up into a tower and when he finally reached the small door at its top, he was feeling out of breath and paused before entering. Then he pushed the door open and went in.

A huge window was set in one wall, a window of clear glass through which he could see the ominous stuff of Chaos leaping. A woman stood by this window as if awaiting him.

"You are indeed a champion, Earl Aubec," said she with a smile that might have been ironic.

"How do you know my name?"

"No sorcery gave it me, Earl of Malador—you shouted it loudly enough when you first saw the hall in its true shape."

"Was not *that*, then, sorcery," he said ungraciously, "the labyrinth, the demons—even the valley? Was not the golem made by sorcery? Is not this whole cursed castle of a sorcerous nature?"

She shrugged. "Call it so if you'd rather not have the truth. Sorcery, in your mind at least, is a crude thing which only hints at the true powers existing in the universe."

He did not reply, being somewhat impatient of such statements. He had learned, by observing the philosophers of Lormyr, that mysterious words often disguised commonplace things and ideas. Instead he looked at her sulkily and overfrankly.

SHE was fair with green-blue eyes and a light complexion. Her long robe was of a similar color to her eyes. She was, in a secret sort of way, very beautiful and, like all the denizens of Kaneloon he'd encountered, a trifle familiar.

"You recognize Kaneloon?" she asked.

He dismissed her question. "Enough of this—take me to the masters of this place!"

"There is none but me, Micella the Dark Lady—and I am the mistress."

He was disappointed. "Was it

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just to meet you that I came through such perils?"

"It was—and greater perils even than you think, Earl Aubec. Those were the monsters of your own imagination!"

"Taunt me not, lady."

She laughed. "I speak in good faith. The castle creates its defenses out of your own mind. It is a rare man who can face and defeat his own imagination. Such a one has not found me here for two hundred years. All since have perished by fear—until now."

She smiled at him. It was a warm smile.

"And what is the prize for so great a feat?" he said gruffly.

She laughed again and gestured towards the window which looked out upon the edge of the world and Chaos beyond. "Out there nothing exists as yet. If you venture into it, you will be confronted again by creatures of your hidden fancy, for there is nothing else to behold."

She gazed at him admiringly and he coughed in his embarrassment. "Once in a while," she said, "there comes a man to Kaneloon who can withstand such an ordeal. Then may the frontiers of the world be extended, for when a man stands against Chaos it must recede and new lands spring into being!"

So that is the fate you have in mind for me, sorceress!"

She glanced at him almost demurely. Her beauty seemed to increase as he looked at her. He clutched at the hilt of his sword, gripping it tight as she moved gracefully towards him and touched him, as if by accident. "There is a reward for your courage." She looked into his eyes and said no more of the reward, for it was clear what she offered. "And after—do my bidding and go against Chaos."

"Lady, know you not that ritual demands of Lormyr's Champion that he be the Queen's faithful consort? I would not betray my word and trust!" He gave a hollow laugh. "I came here to remove a menace to my Queen's kingdom—not to be your lover and lacky!"

"There is no menace here."

"That seems true . . ."

SHE stepped back as if appraising him anew. For her this was unprecedented—never before had her offer been refused. She rather liked this stolid man who also combined courage and imagination in his character. It was incredible, she thought, how in a few centuries such traditions could grow up—traditions which could bind a man to a woman he probably did not even love. She looked at him as he stood there, his body rigid, his manner nervous.

"Forget Lormyr," she said, "think of the power you might

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have—the power of true creation!"

"Lady, I claim this castle for Lormyr. That is what I came to do and that is what I do now. If I leave here alive, I shall be judged the conqueror and you must comply."

She hardly heard him. She was thinking of various plans to convince him that her cause was superior to his. Perhaps she could still seduce him? Or use some drug to bewitch him? No, he was too strong for either, she must think of some other stratagem.

She felt her breasts heaving involuntarily as she looked at him. She would have preferred to have seduced him. It had always been as much her reward as the heroes who had earlier won over the dangers of Kaneloon. And then, she thought, she knew what to say.

"Think, Earl Aubec," she whispered. "Think—new lands for your queen's Empire!"

He frowned.

"Why not extend the Empire's boundaries further?" she continued. "Why not *make* new territories?"

She watched him anxiously as he took off his helm and scratched his heavy, bald head. "You have made a point at last," he said dubiously.

"Think of the honors you would receive in Lormyr if you succeeded in winning not merely Kaneloon—but that which lies *beyond!*"

Now he rubbed his chin. "Aye," he said. "Aye . . ." His great brows frowned deeply.

"New plains, new mountains, new seas—new populations, even—whole cities full of people fresh-sprung and yet with the memory of generations of ancestors behind them! All this can be done by *you*, Earl of Malador—for Queen Eloarde and Lormyr!"

He smiled faintly, his imagination fired at last. "Aye! If I can defeat such dangers here—then I can do the same out there! It will be the greatest adventure in history! My name will become a legend—Malador, Master of Chaos!"

She gave him a tender look, though she had half-cheated him.

He swung his sword up on to his shoulder. "I'll try this, lady."

She and he stood together at the window, watching the Chaos-stuff whisping and rolling for eternity before them. To her it had never been wholly familiar, for it changed all the time. Now its tossing colors were predominantly red and black. Tendrils of mauve and orange spiralled out of this and writhed away.

Weird shapes flitted about in it, their outlines never clear, never quite recognizeable.

He said to her: "The Lords of

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Chaos rule this territory. What will they have to say?"

"They can say nothing, do little. Even they have to obey the Law of the Cosmic Balance which ordains that if man can stand against Chaos, then it shall be his to order and make Lawful. Thus the Earth grows, slowly."

"How do I enter it?"

She took the opportunity to grasp his heavily-muscled arm and point through the window. "See—there—a causeway leads down from this tower to the cliff." She glanced at him sharply. "Do you see it?"

"Ah—yes—I had not, but now I do. Yes, a causeway."

Standing behind him, she smiled a little to herself. "I will remove the barrier," she said.

HE straightened his helm on his head. "For Lormyr and Eloarde and only those do I embark upon this adventure."

She moved towards the wall and raised the window. He did not look at her as he strode down the causeway into the multicolored mist.

As she watched him disappear, she smiled to herself. How easy it was to beguile the strongest man by pretending to go his way! He might add lands to his Empire, but he might find their populations unwilling to accept Eloarde as their Empress. In fact, if Aubec did his work well, then he would be creating more of a threat to Lormyr than ever Kaneloon had been.

Yet she admired him, she was attracted to him, perhaps, because he was not so accessible, a little more than she had been to that earlier hero who had claimed Aubec's own land from Chaos barely two hundred years before. Oh, he had been a man! But he, like most before him, had needed no other persuasion than the allurement of her body.

Earl Aubec's weakness had lain in his strength, she thought. By now he had vanished into the heaving mists.

She felt a trifle sad that this time the execution of the task given her by the Lords of Law had not brought her the usual pleasure.

Yet perhaps, she thought, she felt a more subtle pleasure in his steadfastness and the means she had used to convince him.

For centuries had the Lords of Law entrusted her with Kaneloon and its secrets. But the progress was slow, for there were few heroes who could survive Kaneloon's dangers—few who could defeat self-created perils.

Yet, she decided with a slight smile on her lips, the task had its various rewards. She moved into another chamber to prepare for the transition of the castle to the new edge of the world.

THE END

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ALL FOR NOTHING

By DAVID R. BUNCH

Illustrator LUTJENS

An idea as old as the idea of gods,

and an answer as old as time.

HE came back from Deliverance Hill that night, he and his replacement, the two of them slow-walking under a dead sky. The air, after the storm had passed, was like a box that has been shut too long. There was something of death in its smell, from buildings blown down, old bricks shattered to powder and ancient dusty wood shredded. In his face there was the look of sad-news letters and old wounds hurting, while his replacement's gaze held vacant, noncommittal, or so I thought.

Before, only a short time before, there had been that pounding in the air, a great throbbing, and hail had passed through with a storm that had lightning and tornado funnels, two huge tornado funnels. And looking back on it now, I will agree that there had been one noise through it all, a long-drawn definite and throbbing roar like some very much stretched-out and enormous NooOO-NOOOOO—if you wanted to think of it that way. He thought there had been that. I hadn't thought of it that way then. But I will say this, the older I get and the nearer I get to my own personal date, I mean death, the more I am not sure but what he had been very close to a great idea that night. If he had won . . . But he didn't win, and that's that. He clearly had been rebuffed. Or so he read the wind's sound and the storm's whole voice the night he asked his Big Question at Deliverance Hill.

He had always had a knack with made people. Call them what you will—humanoids, ersatz humans, second selves, it doesn't matter. The truth is, while still quite a young man he had been appointed head of a group of brilliant and enterprising young scientists who were charged with the task of turning out "exact" copies of people for a

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huge agency called World Company of Replaceables, Incorporated. So complete in every detail were these "exact" copies to be that only God, perhaps, would be able to tell they were not "man born of woman."

Now why would we want these factory-made copies in a world that is already fast becoming so crowded with "real" people that before long we may have to tie up millions of them at a time in giant dormant-bags and orbit them while others live? Then we could bring the dormant ones back and revitalize them and let them live a while while others orbited in the dormant bags! Why, faced with a deal like that, would we want more people? WHY? Well, the reasons are many and excellent, as any person of brains readily should perceive. To name only one excellent reason for having "exact" copies available for switches, who at times would not wish to purchase a stand-in to go pound that rock pile, the workaday stint, while he stayed home with a jug, a loaf of bread and thou, or a good mistress? To name another excellent reason, what husband of conscience has not longed to stay home and good all the time, each and every night, and wished also with almost understandable passion to be out with exciting newcomers from time to time for a real live? WELL now! You see ! ?

THE reasons against all this are many and excellent also, and also valid, by any ordinary standards. What a mix-up this could cause, what an overcrowding, what a complete break-up of all human yardsticks in the world. Who stands the trial and walks the air that dark day at the gibbet, for instance? Well, not old YOU the guilty, not so long as you can afford the purchase of your "exact" replica. Who sits through the long, dull terms of the Legislature and makes the laws. Well, not old YOU the elected. NO! You've seen your "twin" sworn, and now you the elected are off in some cool casino living at cards, or perhaps snow-hiking on a famous vacation mountain. To put it bluntly, the whole idea had to be outlawed, and you can see why. To be able to purchase a stand-in whenever necessary would make human living too easy and simple for individual man. By the same token it would surely make the problems much too complex for collective man, society man, that is, which by the very nature of things must ever war on individual man and cut him back to agony. Some stern sadistic clique at the reins in our society wants the status quo, that is, suffering as usual for each and every individual man (and woman). Face the fire, earn your bread, tread that air

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yourself if you've earned the gibbet, let only your own head roll in that basket when the edge falls, do not shirk, jerk! Oh, there's a lots to be said for it if you like to suffer. And it seems you do, you jerks, like to suffer. Also there's lots to be said for the cool view, the stand-in plan and sliding through the ersatz way. But, as I said earlier, it was declared illegal, and that was that. Or so you would have thought. Perhaps.

But if you had thought that, you would have denied a great part of the wonderful human spirit of rebellion, schemes, chicanery, craft and many other things that long have been after some reassessment of the human condition. In the world. And in either heaven or hell.

I SHOULD have known he was not after pigeons or meadow larks or little jenny wren those last years, after he had fallen from his place of greatness as head scientist for the World Company of Replaceables, Incorporated. I should have known he was out for the big roc, the albino whale, the lion that prowls all night, the fire tiger and the long fear loose in the blood of us all. By his eyes I should have known, those last years. He was a vision walking; a transparency was in his face; he had the demeanor of angels on old frescoes. He walked on air those last years, lightly, lightly—while his great dream held; and yet a burden seemed on him too. The whole great burden of man it was, as I found out, and yet he was lifting it, lightly, lightly. For he had hope then, and a flame burned in his face.

But see him after, where he sits strange-companioned along old ditches. In the mud. He carries rocks. They both carry rocks. He hits himself with fence posts. They both do that. He claws at grass and thistles; he gnaws on fleshless bones. They both are odd at food. He is not mad. Oh no! But a tall hope has blown down, a candle has burned out in the cave, and there is no other candle, and the cave is twice as dark now. Oh, better not have the candle, not ever, if a storm is going to roar out of nowhere on the night of your Big Question, and God is going to clearly say No-NooOO NOOO OOO to you and your candle of an idea. If you think He said it, He might as well have said it. Because for you He said it. And that is a kind of final thing, because that is how we are, after all these centuries. And for my friend He said it, that night amidst the great storm and the havoc at Deliverance Hill.

Those years, after the Grand Idea of making commercial replaceables was scrapped, when

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those that were already made were hunted down by every conceivable means under the law and shot like dogs, my friend worked on in a small secret shop, far underground. Sometimes I thought he was mad. A kind of falsely-exalted fallen prince he seemed at times, one who had been a king almost; but just before the crowning of the head a kingdom had been pulled like some glorious crimson carpet out from under the feet, even as those feet were just ready to come thumping down to claim their glory road. For he had been, as we know, a kind of prince or king-almost—a leader in that Grand Idea of Replaceables that was, you would have thought, destined to sweep the earth and change us all. But now, backed up against the tragedy of his fall, he was seeking for himself a thing so much vaster; using all his side knowledge of science and all the cunning in his skills, he was making petty earthly-place-and-status seem nothing, on the road to Deliverance Hill.

It staggers the mind to try to realize what enormity he really was seeking day after day in his small shop, working alone now whereas once he had directed thousands. He was fashioning himself now, a thing that for obvious reasons was not allowed while he was head scientist for the Grand Idea. But in manufacturing himself he was working to tolerances that were not thought of before, not once considered in commercial replaceables. Whereas in the commercial ones it was necessary to fool men, now it was desired to satisfy God. All the science he knew, together with a great passion, freely he brought and freely he laid at the doorstep of this immense concept.

THEN that night in beautiful May, when the stars were firm jewels in a clean sky flooded with a great full moon, he went to a sharp rise of ground that he had picked out years before and had named Deliverance Hill. But there were two people now at the Hill; he had manufactured himself exactly, oh very exactly he had manufactured himself. He had every reason to believe that he was himself twice now. And what he proposed to do, the deal he intended to make, staggers the mind, blind-staggers the mind all ways. Even now thinking of it at stark midnight in dim bars where I sometimes flee, or late at night in my hard bed of no rest and no sleep, or when rains rain down, incessantly down, on the blue-Sunday windows I am appalled. Bats fly through my skull, cats chase mice down alleys of my fear-chilled intestines,

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and my feet and hands go curdled, boneless and cold COLD . . .

But he did not win a yes answer; that is settled. All he won was the storm's No-NooOO-NOOOOOO. And his eyes would flame in his head ever after when he told how one moment all was calm, clear, with all those stars and a wonder moon flooding the blue vault of the May night, and hope's candle burning. Then out of nowhere the storm came, or he thought it did. So it might as well have done that; the results are all the same. The human condition is not changed. Although, privately, I think he probably was bemused and too full up with his question to notice the night closely and the storm's closing in. I think the storm surely was lurking near all along, and it was no miracle. It just happened to swirl up from somewhere near the horizon and break, a sudden storm of spring, in all its fury at the time he made his Big Query, asked his fervent plea. But it does not matter really. The human condition is not changed.

But perhaps he should have won. WON? Yes, won! You see, his bargain, his ominous proposal, was to give the man he'd fashioned, the exact EXACT replica of himself, to the world and to heaven or to hell. And that would have left the real him free of the stark and terrible enormity of the inescapable conditions in the world and in either heaven or hell. In effect he wished to say, "Here God, I give you, as a kind of hostage, him I have made in image. I wish no longer to stay in your terrible Garden. Or to say it another manner, I wish to climb out over these prison walls and go without my number. But I know you must have your prisoner, to love and judge and judge and love and mayhap send to hell. Now all these conditions were set for me, preset for me, before the stage was mine. Instead of 'making the best of the situation,' as the saying goes, I now propose to completely change the situation, that is, cancel out completely! In petitioning my release I give you 'me' all new, a man most clean, most fresh and entirely pure, straight from the factory door."

Then the big storm came up the twin tornado funnels and a monstrous resounding roar like a long-drawn No-NooOO-NOOO-OOO all through it. He was convinced it was a sign; he was convinced that God had not accepted . . .

ONE time, when hours had grown tedious and an awkwardness had fallen upon us where we sat by the side of the road discussing the human con-

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dition, I asked him, "In case of unarguable acceptance, unarguable-in-so-far-as-you-personally-were-concerned acceptance, I mean you were convinced that God said yes, what then did you aim to do with yourself?"

His answer surprised me. In fact it shook me so that for a long while I could only gasp and fish-mouth air and let my eyeballs extend out as they would. Someone watching told me afterwards that at one point my eyes could have been scraped off with ball bats, which is something of an old cliche-saying and probably an exaggeration after all. But I was surprised, let's not deny it. Who wouldn't have been?

After describing in a general way what he had aimed to do with himself and instructing his "twin" to stay ditch-side, where he, the "twin," idly was lumping up mud balls, my friend got up from the ooze at the side of the road and took me over to a long low very-dull-gray-colored building that was made all of metal and had no windows. The one and only door was cut to the general shape and size of the flat, face-forward view of a man of ordinary size, which he was, and when we had squeezed through this door the thump of it shutting was a thud as final and dismal as anything I ever expect to hear. He smiled when we were inside in the bright overpowering excessive light from the ceiling that was all one big flood. "I was ready for that yes answer!" he said. And as he explained it, I could see that he was, or had thought he was, ready.

More diabolical pain machines have been devised, I suppose, and as a torture instrument—well, maybe more sophisticated ones are coming out every day. I don't know definitely that they are not. But until I come face to face with the new champion, this one will do to be my top contender to keep my blood pounding in curdling fear when I remember and to keep a high level of dread hammering just behind my eyeballs when I think of this machine. How could a man so torture a man? How could a man so torture a man, that man being himself!?

Once you got in, there was no turning back. It was onward! The main part of the torture apparatus was shaped something like a huge metal cake pan, one for baking a cake in the general shape of a human being! But thousands of tiny slits were in the metal of this "cake pan," and through these slits the sharpest and thinnest blades imaginable were designed to fall with a strange whining sigh. And once you decided, you clamped yourself in by throwing a switch and

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that was it! You would not be back to tell about it from this "cake pan." You would be in there in the heat—for it was wired to heat you to a flooding sweat—not in the foetal position, not huddled up small to make yourself feel as safe as you possibly could under the circumstances, but stretched out flat to your longest length you would be, which would be with hands and feet extended, fingers and toes out long, flattened a little from the clamping pressure for the very most maximum length available without breaking skin. In other words, instead of stand tall, the machine said lie long—lie long, lie flat; be still and know. —Once begun, the dread mechanism proceeded with an inexorable drama. From both ends there started up that unique sound, that small whining *zippp* of a blade going into the "cake pan." And there you were in there, shut in the hot metal, lying flat, being long, and the knives were coming and you knew they were coming, because you had made this machine! After a suitable while for waiting, and a suitable while for thinking, a blade would just flick at one and a finger end, ever so lightly, two gentle reminders, two little flicking nudges to leave two small-small spurts of blood. And from then on I do not need to tell you. Indeed, perhaps I should not tell you. But while you are thinking of it, to help your thinking, remember that those blades came slow. And also remember that just because a blade came to a toe end that did not mean, not necessarily, that a comparable blade would come to a finger end at the same time. It might and it might not. But know, in any given half hour the exact same length-measurement would be cut from one end as was cut from the other. It would not be much, maybe about one-quarter of an inch of meat and bone, after the falling of say two hundred blades! Slow! But then you would have time, and waiting, anticipating, would be a big part of the thing, and a good part of the thing in there in the heat, as he saw it.

YES, I fainted in that room when the true diabolical import of it all really got to me. And when I revived he said, "Why did you faint? I'm not going to get to use it. He said NO!"

Then he turned to me a face that was all broken up, all fallen apart, all disintegrated with dry crying. I had seen parts of such a face many times in mirrors, my own. I had seen parts of such faces many times in many houses where pain was and death and perhaps marital conflict. But I had never before seen all at

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once such a face as his was, with the broken parts all there broken so much. The nearest to it, perhaps, was a rather young man at a mortuary one time, carrying a stuffed bear and a small blue rabbit. He was bringing them to someone small and wee, I supposed, and oh so alone on a journey, but I didn't press the situation for details. I ran out into the sun, I remember, just from looking at that face and the stuffed bear and the small blue rabbit. Whomever I had come to see and pay my respects to, and I believe it was some casual thing—a friend's great-grandfather perhaps—had to embark without me. I ran out into the sun, and I remember running against wind and distance for a long time then.

And here was a man turning all his broken-parts face toward me and toward a clock that was built into the wall, and as he watched a whirling blade flick seconds toward eternity he said to me, "And so I'll have to face them, face them all, each and every one, here—there—somewhere—earth, heaven and hell. Once in, there is no getting out, not ever, as I guess I've proved. You see, I thought to give God such a copy that I could be relieved. To be simply nothing was my plan; to become less-than-a-zero; to become a never-having-been; not to have to face earth any longer, and heaven or hell forever—never. Can't you see what an immensity I was after, the immensity of complete COMPLETE escape—OBLIVION—?

"But something far back, deep down, nagging, nagging, kept picking at my brains and telling me, 'This will not, indeed should not, be easy. You'll have to earn your pardon, work for your escape from earth and heaven or hell.' And so I thought of this machine. How else has man earned, ever, except through torture, some big or little torture to himself?

AND don't think this diddly cutting and backing machine was all I had planned for myself's destruction. After I was diced small-small, to little strips and droplets, a bottom would open in this "cake pan" on signal to drop the warm liquid me into this pot you see here. Certain chemicals would pour in then from these nozzles here, and these mixing blades would drop down and start whirling. They'd whirl in me and the chemicals until we were a thin colorless liquid. After that this light which is our ceiling would change to a giant heat lamp, and the contents of this pot would be quite dried away. But I'd be somewhere in this room still; I'd have to be, because, as you may or may not have discov-

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ered, once we're in and that door has thumped shut, the room's quite air-tight. But I had that figured. Once I was completely dried out of this pot here, through action of this big sun lamp which is our ceiling now, the overheating of the pot would activate a signal that would send a small pink flare upward from our roof. That flare would alert my patient loyal hired and most-dedicated confederates, for as is not altogether generally known, ha ha, I've a small private air force sequestered in a hidden valley not too far from here, and portable launchers that can wheel out of caves. The airplanes would come to bomb my vapor then, with the latest in megatons. But a simple bomb-drop on the building would not do. There'd have to be support action. As the first bomb hit the building, planes air-borne in a wide circle would release bombs timed to detonate in the air. As my vapor spread out, up from this building in a huge cloud from the first bomb, the air-to-air bombs would come in to blast my vapor a second time. Then the missiles must come off the launchers to crisscross our ring of clouds now and, if it be possible, hit each and every one just at explosion time. And except for one more thing, that's about all I've planned to certify my complete COMPLETE destruction. The one more thing involves some launchers I've posted on the wide ring of mountain peaks that surround us here. I thought if those launchers took pot shots at all the cloud puffs the other missiles left scattered, just as those cloud puffs passed over going outward from our plateau with what was left of my vapor, then no one, not even God, could reasonably say I had not done all that could reasonably be expected of anyone to do, with our present scientific destruction apparatuses and capabilities, to destroy myself."

He paused, but before I could gasp enough air to react, make any reply, he was talking again. "But you see all these plans went for naught. It didn't work! God said NO at Deliverance Hill. And in effect, as I read it, I believe He said to me, 'Stay on, suffer on. You're mine to deal with somewhere forever. Once in, there's no getting out. And don't try palming off that substitute!"—So now I've got this other guy, this 'me,' who's really illegal, you know, who looks exactly like me—well, almost—and all this scientific destruction capability just going to waste. WHAT SHALL I DO!?"

I DIDN'T have the answer. But I figured he did. Or would have it soon, his mind being so much more fertile than mine

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that way. And I wasn't wrong. A strange glow, almost an exalted look, gathered on his face while I watched it, and the broken parts went back together. Then wheeling without a word, he left out through the man-shaped door, and I was hard put to keep up with him as we started back toward the ditch where his almost-exact other-self waited, still absently lumping mud balls together. He had a godly look, a silent-sternness look, a this-is-the-only-thing-to-do look, as he hauled the "man" making mud balls up from the ditch.

As they started across to the building and the man-shaped door, one of them urging to walk faster, I anxiously scanned a blank sky for clouds. Now seemed the time to me, richly the time to me, for a storm that would say NO. But no cloud showed and suddenly I knew, if ever there was a time to run, now was such a time. I waited no longer than the minutes it took for him to clamp his almost-exact other-self in the "cake pan," start that instrument on its terrible drama and reappear from the building. Then we were both head-down and running and he soon caught up to me. "We'll have to clear those mountain peaks to be anywheres near to safe," he said pointing at a far smudge of tall mountain tops in the shimmery haze. "Any less than that and they'll get us sure, the missiles, when they launch to blast at the cloud puffs." When we could go no farther and had to stop to rest he said to me, face all breaking apart, dry crying in his voice, "To think, all this for nothing, NOTHING!" But when we were able we ran some more, for the peaks, we ran . . .

THE END

TO THE VICTOR

(Continued from page 71)

Martin sent trees toppling. Salabeasts screamed their terror. The war is over, he thought. And the disaster of peace is about to begin. From the depths of his hurt heart came the words to torture him. *Each man kills the thing he loves.* And other words as awful. *To the victor go the spoils.*

It was Cecily who finally found him far away from Cityside, roaming the blue-hazed hills and he wept when she asked him what he was doing and answered that he was remembering all the wars won and all the years lost.

Cecily patiently puckered her lips, then said, "You're to come Cityside, Grandsir, Papa says *right now!*"

THE END

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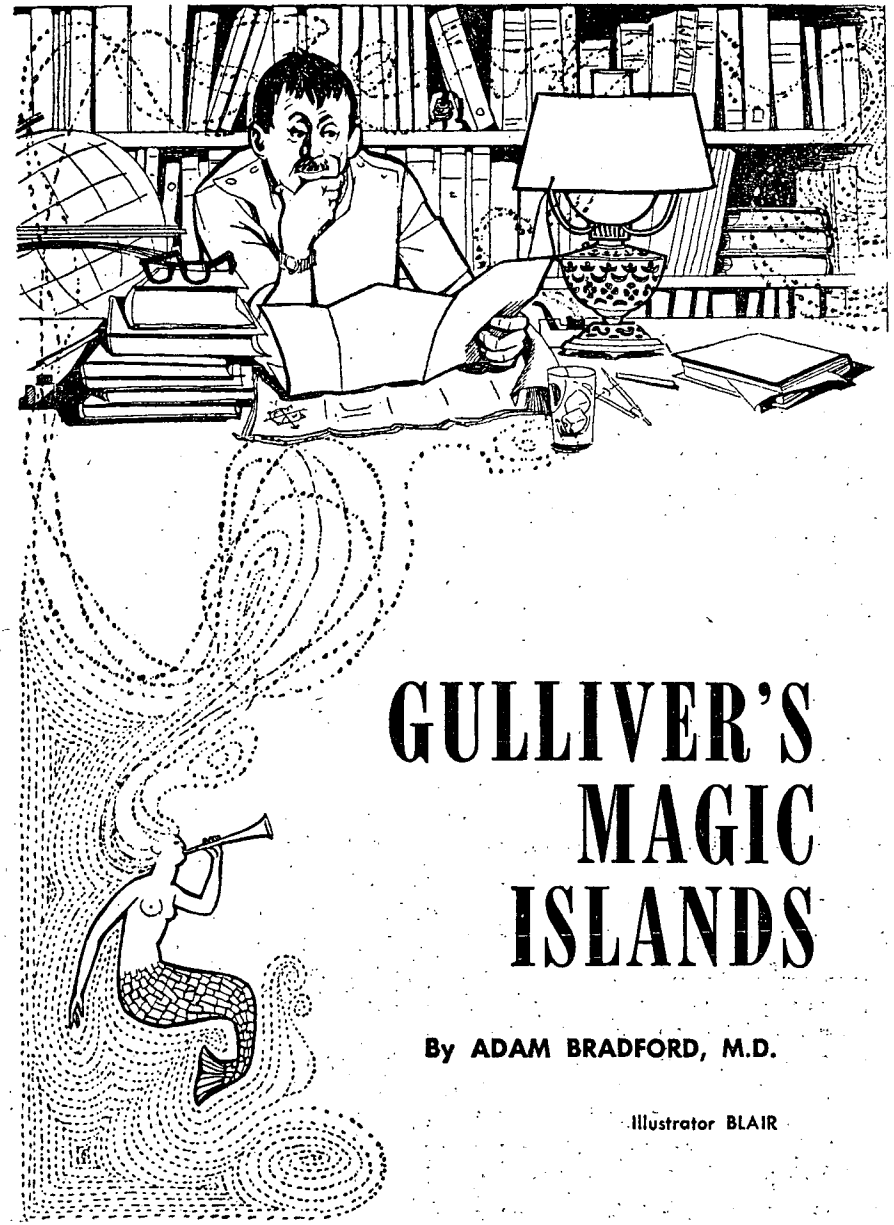

GULLIVER'S MAGIC ISLANDS

By ADAM BRADFORD, M.D.

Illustrator BLAIR

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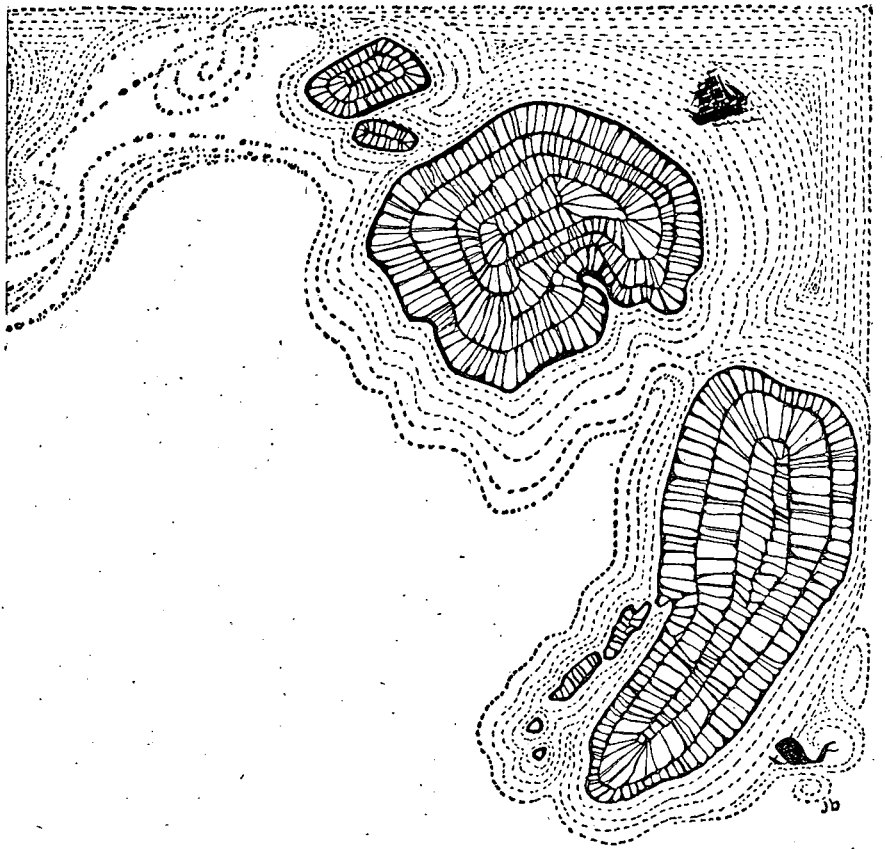

Dr. Adam Bradford, spiritual descendant of Lemuel Gulliver, who recently, in these pages, re-visited Lilliput and Brobdingnag, now travels to Gulliver's fabled isles of Balnibari, Laputa and Glubbdubdrib—with many wondrous adventures and much caustic observations.

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SINCE I had spent most of the last five and one-half years exploring Lilliput and Brobdingnag, I had grown weary of adventure and of the sea and had been happy in my practice of orthopedic surgery in association with my uncle in Boston. I had renewed many of my pleasant old associations and had, after an interrupted courtship, become engaged to Penelope Choate, a girl whom I had known since childhood when we sailed together in the Marblehead Races.

Medical practice, however, had grown tiresome and I had had no vacation—not a single day, it seemed—for 18 months. When I read the ad in the J.A.M.A. seeking a ship's surgeon for a banana boat trip to Latin America, I suddenly felt every muscle in my body tighten. Although I vowed that I would never again resume my search for Gulliver's islands, I somehow found myself closeted in my study, pouring over the old, original maps that I had unearthed while doing medical research in Oxford and had so zealously guarded through all my earlier voyages.

In going over the old maps and Gulliver's original notes, I discovered that Laputa, Balnibari, Luggnagg and Glubbdubdrib (the islands Gulliver visited on his third voyage) were actually in the Pacific Ocean, west of California and south of Hawaii. Since most banana boats keep in Atlantic waters picking up cargo in the eastern ports of Central and South American countries, I knew that I would be out of temptation's path. I decided to reply to the "blind" ad in the J.A.M.A. seeking a ship's surgeon. In stating my qualifications, I not only mentioned my years of training and experience in orthopedic surgery but also my equally extensive experience at sea.

The reply to my letter, dated January 26, 1957, came two weeks later and it seemed straightforward enough and seemed ideally suited to my plans. The freighter, *Adolphos Cristiarkos*, was sailing from Boston on March 27th with a crew of 32 men. The captain, Kevin O'Toole, was most cordial in his reply and made the trip inviting. He indicated that he was taking a load of refrigerators, second-hand automobiles and other heavy machinery to Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica and was planning to return to the States in six weeks with bananas, coconuts, coffee and tobacco. Since the winter had already been long and tiresome and since I needed a vacation so badly, I decided to sign on board as ship's surgeon, being second in command to Captain O'Toole, himself. Not only was I to be paid a handsome stipend for this "pleasure trip" but I would also

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share in any profits that resulted. It was an offer that I could hardly refuse.

AND so, on the dawn of March 27, 1957, I sailed from Long Wharf on the *Adolphos Cristiarkos,* little suspecting that I was about to begin one of the most exciting of all my adventures. My accommodations on board ship, while not luxurious, were comfortable enough, and Captain O'Toole was a rugged, ruddy-faced Irishman, a former Marine, looking surprisingly like the muscular heroes depicted in the illustrations of the fantastic yarns that one can read in any man's adventure magazine. He stood about 6 feet, 2 inches tall, and weighed, I would guess, about 220 pounds. Although he seemed friendly enough outwardly, he was most reticent when it came to answering personal questions that I put to him. At dinner, for example, when the conversation seemed to be on a warm and friendly basis or when I tried to get detailed information about our boat or our cargo, he often cut me off with an abrupt, "How about another drink, Doc?"

The crew was mostly Spanish with a few Irish and Portugese and was not exactly typical of what one usually finds on such tramp freighters. The men did their work not in the routine, mechanical fashion that is customary on such a trip but seemed bound together by some mysterious *espirit de corps* which, at first, I could not fathom. In my naive way, suspecting nothing, I attributed their apparent loyalty to each other and their apparent devotion to their work to the admirable leadership and direction imposed upon them by Captain O'Toole.

Our days at sea passed uneventfully enough and I spent my time lazily resting and relaxing on deck or in my quarters. The few minor cuts and bruises that I treated hardly taxed my professional skill. I began to wonder why I had been so eagerly induced to join the crew since, till now, there seemed hardly any need for my services. One morning, when I checked our bearings and noted that we were *already* at 82° west and 10 north *and had not touched any port,* I was quickly jostled out of my lethargy. For some reason, the *Adolphos Cristiarkos* was not stopping in Central America but was *continuing south!* I rushed to Captain O'Toole and confronted him with the facts. When and why had the plans been changed? Why had I not been informed?

O'Toole suddenly became ill-tempered and abusive.

"I'm the Captain of this boat," he bellowed, "and I don't have to

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discuss anything with you or anyone. If you must know, Dr. Bradford, we're going to Colombia and, if you have any objections, *you can leave now.*"

He looked as if he would throw me overboard if I uttered any comment at all. I was completely bewildered and shocked by this strange turn in events. Silence, I decided, would be the best policy. I knew, however, I was in trouble, although I did not appreciate yet how serious my predicament actually was. Two things were certain now in my mind: I was a prisoner on this boat and I must escape. If I waited for more detailed explanations, it might be too late.

Our passage through the Panama Canal was without incident, although I tried once or twice to call attention to my predicament by tossing a note in a bottle to some of the workers on the locks, but my aim was poor and the bottle fell into the water where it could not possibly be retrieved.

ONCE we were in Pacific waters and heading south to Colombia, a change occurred in the make-up of our crew that clarified both the nature of our mission and the mystery of why I had been pressed into service. Our cargo, which was now being brought up from the hold of the ship, consisted, to my surprise and dismay, mainly of rifles, machine guns, ammunition, small light tanks and other military equipment suitable for guerilla warfare. Our "crew" had actually been secretly gathered and organized by O'Toole as a fighting force to support a military junta that was to stage an uprising to overthrow the existing Colombian government. The revolution was planned to start as soon as we docked at a secret rendezvous. I had, in fact, been "kidnapped" by O'Toole as a *military* surgeon rather than as a ship's doctor.

"Tomorrow night, we'll land at Mosquera," O'Toole told me abruptly, "and, brother, will we surprise them. Surprised you, too, didn't we, Doctor? Just be a good lad and take care of our men and we'll take care of you later."

The way he said, "we'll take care of you later," had an ominous tone that sent a shiver down my spine. I now knew that I was not the prisoner of some irresponsible madman but was in the hands of a ruthless soldier of fortune who would stop at nothing to gain victory. I knew that I would have to escape soon or I would be killed. At once, the plan of escape suddenly became clear in my mind.

* * *

That night before supper, I secretly stole into the galley and emptied ten vials of sodium

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phenobarbital into the coffee that was warming on the cook's stove. After drugging O'Toole and his crew, I was able to get my belongings and provisions into a lifeboat on the starboard side. I then lowered the lifeboat until it touched the sea and cast off from the *Adolphos Cristiarkos*. Since we were then in sight of the coast just west of Buenaventura, my plan was to row to shore and seek help.

I had not rowed more than a hundred yards when a sudden squall blew up and strong offshore winds drove me further and further out to sea. My strength was quickly being exhausted. I had to stop rowing and had to use whatever energy I possessed to bail water to keep the lifeboat afloat. I covered myself with a poncho and a tarpaulin, but still I was wet, tired and frightened. When the rain subsided by early dawn, I fell into a deep sleep.

When I awoke, the bright sun was shining in my eyes and the sea was again calm. I tried to shake off my mental fogging and pierce the dull loginess that penetrated and racked my whole body. I knew that I was adrift in the Pacific, west of Colombia, drifting toward the Galapagos Islands. The date, as accurately as I could figure, was May 8, or 9, 1957, for I had been six weeks at sea. I set up a makeshift sail using one oar as a mast and the second oar I improvised as a rudder. I checked on my meager supply of provisions and hoped that I might at last reach the Isla del Coco or the Isla del Malpelo even if I could not get to the Galapagos Islands, themselves, before my food and water ran out. I tried to recall all I had ever learned about survival at sea. Somehow, I still had faith that I would survive.

By nightfall, my faith in myself was somewhat shaken for I saw no sight of land and guessed that I had sailed too far in a southerly direction and must have missed the islands. Since the winds in this part of the world are mostly westerly, I had drifted further and further into the uncharted Pacific approximately 10° to 20° south of the Equator and 90° to 100° west longitude. With luck, in a week or so, I might be able to reach the Tuamotu Archipelago. My poncho could be used as a shield against the burning sun. I could catch fish with the hook and line that I had taken aboard with me. By squeezing the carcasses of the fish, I might be able to add water to my meager supplies. The situation, I decided, was not entirely hopeless. I fell asleep.

THE dawn was indescribably beautiful but, I must admit, offered me little pleasure. With

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my jackknife, I opened a can of tuna, used most of it for food and the rest to bait my hook. I caught several fish but could not identify them and did not know if they were edible. I skinned and dissected them as best I could and squeezed their juices into my empty can of tuna. The rest of the carcasses I set aside for bait.

The day was tiresome but, by nightfall, I knew that I could survive for a few weeks at sea if I suffered no major accident. Exhausted, I was just about to fall asleep when I caught a glimpse of what seemed to be an island in the distance but it was so brightly illuminated that, at first, I thought it was a full moon rising from the ocean floor. Suddenly, I was wide awake again and my strength seemed renewed. Could this be some secret American naval base, I wondered.

Quickly, I brought down my sails, disengaged the rudder and used the two oars to row to the bright land in the distance. I arrived there in about two hours, utterly exhausted from the rowing and tense with excitement. Luckily, I found a sandy beach where I could secure my boat, covered my gear with the tarpaulin and headed toward the city that seemed so brightly illuminated. The countryside was rustic, hardly what one would expect of a secret naval base.

After about an hour's walk in which I encountered not another living person, I came upon a "lamp" which consisted of a pole on which was hung a huge jar of what appeared simply to be pickled cucumbers. Light as bright as several hundred of our ordinary incandescent bulbs emanated from the pickles in this jar. Other poles with glowing pickles were set up at several hundred feet apart from each other. I knew at once now where I was. I had arrived at Gulliver's island of *Balnibari*.

But I was too exhausted to proceed any further. I came to a small orange grove and, sheltered from the cold night air and bright light, fell asleep.

Balnibari, as the reader may recall from Gulliver's original account, was first visited by Gulliver himself on February 16, 1708. Its capitol city, *Lagado*, was the seat of the famous academy where the research scientists of their day were working on many projects which Gulliver scorned and ridiculed because he could not understand their real significance. Like practicing physicians of our own time, Gulliver was a "practical" orthopedic surgeon and was sceptical of the research performed in the ivory towers by his contemporaries. Actually, Gulliver "went for many Days to the Academy." Every room in the Academy had

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one or more Professors and Gulliver visited none fewer "than five Hundred Rooms".

Gulliver noted that the first man that he met in the Academy was "of a meagre Aspect, with sooty Hands and Face, his Hair and Beard long, ragged and singed in several Places." This scientist had been working for eight years on a project "for extracting Sun-Beams out of Cucumbers, which were put into Vials hermetically sealed, and let out to warm the air in raw inclement Summers." This scientist had not yet completed his project at that time and Gulliver "made him a small Present" of money to continue his research but had no confidence that the project would succeed. As a matter of fact, Gulliver gave most of the scientists he met extra money because, as a stranger in their midst, he wanted to be highly regarded. Little did he know that he was revolutionizing and improving the life of all *Balnibarians*.

WHEN I first awoke in the morning, it took me a few moments to know where I was. A group of well-dressed men and women had gathered around me, some picking oranges, some just conversing with each other. They appeared friendly enough and I asked for directions to *Lagado*. They seemed confused at this question, but then, one old man recalled that *Lagado* was the ancient term for the capitol city which is now known as *Gullivando*. It was then that I realized how much of an impact Gulliver had made, without his knowledge, upon this obscure and remote island. His most notable contribution had been toward the development of a method for extracting light from cucumbers, but he also aided many of the other scientists in their equally valuable research.

Realizing that I could personally benefit from Gulliver's fame, I concocted a mild fabrication that I was a great-grandson of the great traveler, himself. In this way I hoped that I would win their friendship easily and that my trip through their country would be less hazardous than might otherwise be possible. I indicated, too, that I was tired and hungry from my journey and needed additional food and rest. To my great joy, the *Balnibarians* readily accepted my story and welcomed me into their own homes with every display of respect and affection.

My host at breakfast proved to be no less than the community's mayor, whose name was *Koorlee*, and he offered to be my guide on a trip to *Gullivando* since I expressed a great interest to go there. Since *Koorlee* was known and respected by all *Gullivan-*

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does, I was treated with singular respect on my visit there.

Gullivando, I learned from my host, was only five or six miles away and could easily be reached by a twenty minute ride on the *Fragal* (*"mobile platform"*) which corresponds to our MTA system. The *Fragal* is completely automated and apparently is driven along by an intermittently-acting relatively low-velocity jet propulsion engine and travels on wheels like a continuous belt. Its action is constant, and one gets on and off at any point one desires since its forward motion is so gentle. There are no fares for this ride since *Gullivando* has become exceedingly wealthy from royalties accruing from the inventions of the Professors in the Academy. Unlike our own MTA system, the *Fragal* is never involved in labor-management disputes because of its complete automation. There are several *Fragal* belts, complete with chairs for those who wish to sit, and they enter the city from the major points of the compass.

AS I approached *Gullivando* on the *Fragal*, I could see many buildings of varying sizes but the tallest and largest of these was the Academy itself. It had apparently tripled or quadrupled in size since Gulliver's day. The pursuit of science had become the major industry.

Koorlee, the mayor, was well pleased to take me on a tour of the Academy and act as interpreter and guide. At first I could recall only a few words from Gulliver's *Balnibari Dictionary* but as time went on my knowledge of the country and its language improved. I must admit that *Koorlee's* help and my synthetic fame as Gulliver's linear descendant helped in my tour of the city as much as if I were a Russian diplomat seeking to buy grain in the United States.

The Academy, whose full title is Academy of Distinguished Arts and Sciences, is, as I have already mentioned, the most prominent building in *Gullivando*. It is a hexagon in shape and twelve stories tall. There is a central shaft for elevators and staircases and from this central shaft six wings or divisions jut out like the points of a compass. Each division is given over to a special science or art and each protects its own discoveries with a secrecy reserved in our country for the most delicate military matters.

As I entered the lobby from the street level I was immediately impressed by the different clothes or uniforms the scientists were wearing. Some were dressed in blue from head to toe while others wore red, yellow, green, gray, and orange. Some were dressed in white, and I as-

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sumed that they were medical doctors such as we have in our country. In Gulliver's day, the inhabitants of *Balnibari* and *Laputa* wore peculiar costumes covered with astrological signs and with pictures or drawings of musical instruments. I asked *Koorlee* if the uniforms had special significance.

"Each uniform," *Koorlee* replied, "represents a special science or art and each scientist is proud of the costume he wears and is contemptuous of all others. The dull gray is worn by the biologists since they are held generally in lowest esteem by all the others. The bright orange is the garb of the chemist and the scarlet or the red, of the physicists."

"What about golds and white," I asked, "are they doctors or nurses?"

"No," he answered, "in *Gullivando* the doctors and nurses are considered in the laboring class and are not as distinguished in their dress as the *real* scientists. The white uniforms are those of the mathematicians and *theoretical* physicists. They are allowed to wear pure white because they are the most noble of all the members of the Academy."

The laboratories of the Academy are located on the higher floors of the building. The first floor is occupied by a vast conference room in which there were twenty or thirty large tables on which were piled tall stacks of papers. Busied around these tables were many scientists, each table distinguished by a group dressed in its own singular color. Around one or two tables, however, there were a few scientists with differently colored garments.

"What are all these scientists doing here?" I asked *Koorlee*.

"They are trying to find projects for the money that is made available to them by the government and by private foundations for research. Do you see that big board over there?" He pointed to the large wall behind us on the side through which we had just entered the large conference room.

"Yes," I replied.

"See the numbers on the big board?" *Koorlee* continued, "Those numbers in the different columns indicate the amount of money available by different groups that sponsor the various research projects."

MY attention was at once riveted to a large board (which the *Gullivandoes* call the *Gofer Broak*) which occupied almost the entire wall, and which was brilliantly illuminated by jars of hermetically sealed cucumbers such as light up their highways at night. Numbers were listed in

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columns under various colors corresponding to the colors of the scientist's clothing. These numbers kept changing, most of them going up while only a few went down. It was like sitting in a modern stock broker's office watching the latest market quotations. The scientists at the tables kept watching the boards and then rifled through the stack of papers on their tables and then appeared to carry on animated conversations with each other.

"What are they doing?" I asked *Koorlee.*

"They are matching research projects with the amount of money available. Suppose that at this moment a grant of 100,000 *Kreemitz* (a *Kreem* is approximately equal to $1.80 in our money) has just been released by a foundation interested in physical research. The *Gofer Broak* flashes the news under the heading of the pure white light of the physical sciences. The physical scientists—those with the white coats—scramble through the pile of projected projects to see which one comes closest to using up the entire amount of money in the grant. If this money is not completely used up, then the most terrible catastrophe may befall the scientists—they may not get additional grants for their favorite projects next year. Would you care to go over and talk to some of the scientists?"

Koorlee introduced me to the men with the white coats, but they hardly took notice of my presence. They kept turning the heaps of manuscripts upside down, some uttering shouts of glee while others moaned with despair. A few manuscripts of projected research were tossed aside; some even fell to the floor. I asked *Koorlee* to translate the titles for me, and he gladly complied because he was so proud of the project his fellow Balnibarians were undertaking. I cannot remember all these works, but some have remained indelible in my mind because they were so similar to some of the papers published in our own country as a result of the stimulus of grant money. Of the many titles that I saw, I mention briefly only four so that the reader will not be prejudiced by my opinions but will be able to draw his own conclusions. These titles were:—

Coaxial Coefficients in Binary Logarithmic Platitudes under Variable Conditions of Stress-Inducing Thermocouples,

Mating Habits of Homozygous Planaria in Citrate Solutions of pH 5.2 to 7.8,

Re-Evaluation of Grulbrudlick's Law of Intrinsic Deviations and Components with a Note on a New Theory of Derviation of Past Participles,

Polymerization of Alpha Par-

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ticles in Helium under Monocular Visualization of Presbyopes.

After careful study of the above titles, anyone who has a real knowledge of science will readily agree with me, I am sure, that the Balnibarians are just as advanced as we are in the pursuit of theoretical science. Some might even contend that they are more advanced although my own limited knowledge of mathematics and physics and my natural inclination to loyally defend the research of my own countrymen might compel me to place our own research a little ahead of theirs.

SUFFICE it to say that I spent the whole day watching the flashing lights on the *Gofer Broak* and the hectic jousting of the scientists to match their research to the grant-money available for its pursuit. It was an exhausting experience for me, but the scientists seemed to enjoy their activity much like our own college football players enjoy a game that they have just finished victoriously. Some Balnibarian scientists, I suspect, might have even enjoyed more the fiscal aspects of their science and the monetary rewards than their theoretical cogitations.

I returned to *Koorlee*'s home that night and rested quite comfortably. When I tried to question him about *practical* applications of the research that we witnessed, he simply pointed to the hermetically sealed vials of cucumbers that were now sending out their beams of light across the highways and reverted to lavish praise of my ancestor, Gulliver, whose financial assistance made all this possible. He asked me if I had noticed the three mottoes or slogans that were engraved in stainless steel just above the main entrance of the Academy, I said that I had, but since I couldn't translate them, they didn't impress me. He apologized for his oversight for not having translated them before since they were the most important maxims in the land. Translated they read as follows:

Science for Science's Sake
From Science Comes Light
You Can Be Sure If It's Science.

Needless to say, I was very much impressed by these maxims and was only sorry that my countrymen were not so brilliant and bold in their concepts and thinking. Perhaps this record of the *Balnibarians* can further stimulate research in our country and, if it does, I shall feel that I have made a significant contribution to the advance of American science in my age.

Early the next day, I dressed myself in Balnibarian clothing which *Koorlee* gave me and ventured again to the academy. I

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skipped the first floor entirely because I felt that the *Gofer Broak* would prove too much of a lure for me and that my fascination of its flashing numbers would detain me there for too long a time. The Balnibarian scientists intrigued me, and I had to learn more of their research methods. I went directly to the second floor which is occupied by a large amphitheatre or lecture hall. Since a class seemed to be in session, I entered quietly and sat in one of the rear seats where I would not cause any disturbance. *Koorlee* was kind enough to act as my interpreter.

A PROFESSOR or lecturer in striped orange and black clothing was addressing a group of mixed students of chemists, biologists and sociologists whom I could recognize now by their distinctively colored suits. The amphitheatre was packed because this was one of their most important lectures (*Koorlee* told me), and one in which all scientists were interested. The lecturer was the head of one of the major governmental agencies interested in sponsoring research and directly responsible for approving their grants. His lecture consisted of detailed advice on the preparation of scientific papers so that they would be acceptable by the government. As far as I could determine nothing was said about the quality of the research to be done or the method by which a scientific problem could be worked out. The lecture consisted entirely on how the letter to the appropriate agency (governmental or otherwise) should be framed, and the language in which the proposed project was to be phrased. Although I may have not understood some of the details, I kept careful notes on what I did hear because they might be useful at some time to the scientists in our own country.

First the letter is written (*Balnibarians*, strangely, have no typewriters) on the best grade of white paper to indicate that the scientist seeking the grant is financially well-off and doesn't *need* the money for money's sake. The salutation at the head of the letter must always read: "Your Most Brilliant Director." Variations of this, such as "Your Most Worshipful Director" or "Most Brilliant Director" are considered inaccurate or in bad taste or a reflection of slipshod methodology and may make completely void any claim to a grant. Margins must be exactly two *Triltritz* wide (about one inch) for the application to be given any further consideration. Wider or narrower margins are regarded as being *fraugh* (*sloppy*) and do not meet the governmental code.

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The application, itself, and the summary of the research to be undertaken must not exceed twelve pages or be less than three pages. Previous experience with *Balnibarian* governmental officials (the lecturer said) indicates that their attention span is limited to twelve pages and that anything longer than this makes them fall asleep or makes them miss the *Fragal* back home. In any case, it provokes animosity toward the applicant, and invites the *Kribbid* Stamp ("Disallowed"). Anything less than three pages indicates that the researcher does not have his whole heart and soul in his project.

All the students were busy taking notes as the lecturer talked and, when he finished about two hours later, summary sheets were handed to the students with the examples of the applications that had in the past won quick and easy governmental endorsement. The final examination at the end of the third term, I learned from *Koorlee,* consisted largely in setting up three alternate research projects that would win such grants. Students who win three grants graduate *Blachtat Kfamma* which is roughly translated as Summa Cum Laude. Fewer grants win lesser recognition, and the student who wins no grant must content himself with some lesser position such as practicing medicine or law.

AFTER the lecture I went with *Koorlee* to the upper floors of the Academy to observe what kinds of research were now being done. The third and fourth floors are reserved for the social scientists and the economists. I was intrigued to find that among the social scientists there were many workers in the field of juvenile delinquency, but the *Balnibarians* were no closer to a solution of this problem than we. One scientist, who had studied many other mammal family groups, including ardvarks and monkeys, had concluded that juvenile delinquency does not exist in mammals other than man because the "lower" mammals give their offspring a sound cuffing when they disobey their elders. He had, therefore, advocated stronger discipline of children during their youth and adolescence, but his views were not regarded as being scientifically significant by any of the others because they were too simple and comprehensible. The *Balnibarians* claim that the social science to be meaningful must be vague, obscure, and capable of mathematical analysis. The social scientists who can state their concepts in mathematical equations are consequently held in the highest respect.

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Although we do not regard economists as "scientists," the *Balnibarians* do. The chief reason for this is that the economists, through science, have developed an interesting method for keeping their employment at a high level without recourse to war or other acts destructive to human life.

At present they are especially interested in rocketry which they have developed into a fine skill. To launch their feeblest rocket costs about 20,500,000 *Kreemitz* and requires the employment of about 3,000 men working about eight months. The economists were especially jubilant the morning I visited them because the day before a rocket had inadvertently exploded in air shortly after taking off and had widely missed its target in the Pacific. The joy among the economists was far greater than would have resulted from a successful launching because it meant that much additional work would have to be done on the next rocket.

Rockets are fired at least one a month even if there is no specified target. If the economy lags, a rocket may be fired every few weeks until there is full employment. *Balnibarian* scientists and economists seemed totally in accord about the value of rocketry although, I must admit, as a conservative New Englander, I could not grasp the economic wisdom in acts so destructive of material, time, and effort. However, I kept my mental reservations to myself for fear of being considered ignorant by men whose technical skill surpassed ours in so many ways.

I returned many times to the Academy, making more than 20 trips in all. The research that I witnessed was so extensive and varied that I cannot recall all of it here. But I have carefully collected my notes and observations for a more exhausting account that I am presenting shortly to the National Academy of Arts and Sciences in Washington, D.C. I shall not bother the reader with technical details, therefore, except to point out what directions research has taken that was observed by Gulliver, himself, when he was at the Academy. Since I have already mentioned their successful results at storing light in cucumbers, I shall say nothing about this project.

GULLIVER mentioned an architectural project of building houses by starting with the roof and working down. Although Gulliver derided this scientist's efforts, I am pleased to report that this project, too, was happily completed shortly thereafter. At present, practically all houses in *Balnibari* are built this way and, I understand, experi-

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ments along this line are in progress in the United States.

Most important was Gulliver's mention of one professor who had "Forty Pupils" and who worked on a large frame in which words pasted on small pieces of wood could be moved at random to make phrases or bits of sentences. At each turn of an "Iron Handle" new words appeared on the frame, and they were copied down by the pupils who work six hours a day turning the crank and recording the odd expressions as they appeared. When questioned about this project, the professor showed Gulliver "several Volumes in large Folio already collected of broken sentences, which he intended to piece together; and out of those rich materials to give The World a compleat Body of all Arts and Sciences."

I am pleased to report that this project has been completely automated. A small engine similar to that which powers the *Fragal* now turns the crank and the words are transcribed exactly as they appear and at a rate far greater than could have been anticipated either by Gulliver or the old professor. Words rush out of the contraption with tremendous speed, and pages of these words are bound together daily in books which are sold to the public at a great profit to the Academy.

Although some *Balnibarians* privately admitted to me that they couldn't derive any meaning whatsoever out of these books, most *Balnibarians* profess that they provide great insight, pleasure, and understanding. The machine is now called the "Subconscious Thought Machine" and, since its "writings" are endorsed by the members of the Academy, most *Balnibarians* are naturally reluctant to admit they cannot understand them for fear of being considered ignorant.

Some of these books have been converted to plays just the same way as it is done by so many of the *avant garde* writers in America and England. Some professors in the Academy sincerely believe that the more obscure the writing is, the more profound it is. One scholar published a book with only two or three words on each page, and these words were separated from each other by blank spaces of varying sizes. It is this author's contention that, since silence is more golden than speech, the long pause is more meaningful than the written word. At present, this author's novels and plays are most widely read by the *Balnibarians,* and he is considered the most profound and intellectual of them all.

During the first four weeks of my stay on *Balnibari,* I was so

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absorbed by the Academy and its research that I had completely forgotten about *Laputa,* the Flying Island that Gulliver had described. At the same time the *Balnibarians* never mentioned it to me since, as I then believed, they had always had it and accepted it as a natural phenomenon like the moon and the tide. This reticence concerning *Laputa* stemmed from other reasons, however, as I shall shortly point out.

IT was early in the fifth week of my stay that I observed a dense cloud in the northwest sky which I first believed to be the approach of a typhoon. As the sky blackened and I grew more apprehensive, I noticed that the natives did not appear at all disturbed; and so I questioned one about this phenomenon. It was then that *Laputa,* the Flying or Floating Island, was vividly brought to my attention.

The reader may recall that *Laputa* was an exactly circular island whose diameter was approximately five miles, and it pursued a regular course in the sky being suspended between heaven and earth by large magnets one of which was in *Laputa* itself and the other, buried deep in the earth of *Balnibari.* Since the course and direction of the magnet in *Laputa* could be changed rotating its axis, the island could be lowered or elevated at will and made to pursue an elliptical course about a mile above *Balnibari.* For many years the *Laputans* had been able to subjugate and terrorize the *Balnibarians* by their ability to lower the island and literally crush any uprising below them.

The *Laputans,* themselves, had always had their heads cocked to one side or the other with one eye turned upwards and the other turned inward. They were so involved in thoughts of theoretical mathematics and music that they could not remember anything practical and even had to be reminded to speak or eat. They wore strange colorful costumes on which were painted or embroidered astrological figures or musical instruments. The king's palace stood at the top of the island, and he ruled it as a strict monarch. Passengers and material could be lowered to the mainland below or brought up to the island by hoisting devices located in several strategic areas. Gulliver, himself, had been carried up to *Laputa* by a crane and windlass device.

When I expressed concern about the island's approach lest it be lowered and I be crushed to death, the *Balnibarians* laughed at my anxiety and assured me that it was no longer possible. In the year of *Froltagg* (about 1801), *Graffar Billigg,* a

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leading *Balnibarian* scientist and revolutionist, perfected an anti-magnetic device making it forever impossible for the island to descend. Within two months after this historic invention, the *Laputans* were forced to surrender because they were starving to death. The *Balnibarian* day of liberation from *Laputa* is called *Frolltaggtagg* and is the most sacred and celebrated holiday in the country. *Graffar Billigg,* himself, is still worshiped as the nation's greatest leader, and a statue to his memory stands in the center of *Gullivando* not far from the Academy.

Since I was thus reassured as to my safety, I made further inquiry of the persons who had gathered about me into the nature of *Laputa* and its current use in the national economy. What purpose does the island serve now? What is to be gained by keeping this vast object up there? Why not have it grounded and developed as an offshore island? Since most of the *Balnibarians* to whom I directed these questions could not or would not give me clear and satisfactory answers, I was referred to the *Blaffnar* or *administrator* of *Laputa* whose name was *Nallgall* and whose office was in *Gullivando*. Had I realized then what would happen next, I would never have asked these questions and I certainly would not have gone to *Nallgall* for the answers. If my conjecture is correct, *Laputa* now can be considered an armed fortress and the main defense of *Balnibari*. Because of its short range it cannot be used for offensive purposes. The *Balnibarians* are reluctant to discuss *Laputa* because its mode of activation is still a top secret, and they fear that any leak of information to the surrounding islands might prove disastrous.

WHEN I went to visit *Nallgall,* I was completely unaware of *Laputa's* military significance. *Nallgall* was a stocky round-faced man of thirty-two who spoke a few words of English and Spanish having been shipwrecked as a child off the coast of California. Although his parents went down in this disaster, he had been brought back to *Balnibari* at the age of 19 by an uncle who spent six years searching the seas for traces of survivors. It was *Nallgall,* I later learned, who had taught *Koorlee* and a few other *Balnibarians* the small amount of English that they knew; and thus had been able to serve as interpreters for me as I traveled through the country. *Nallgall* and *Koorlee,* it proved, were the closest of friends.

In spite of his pleasant outward manner, *Nallgall* interrogated me most closely and, at

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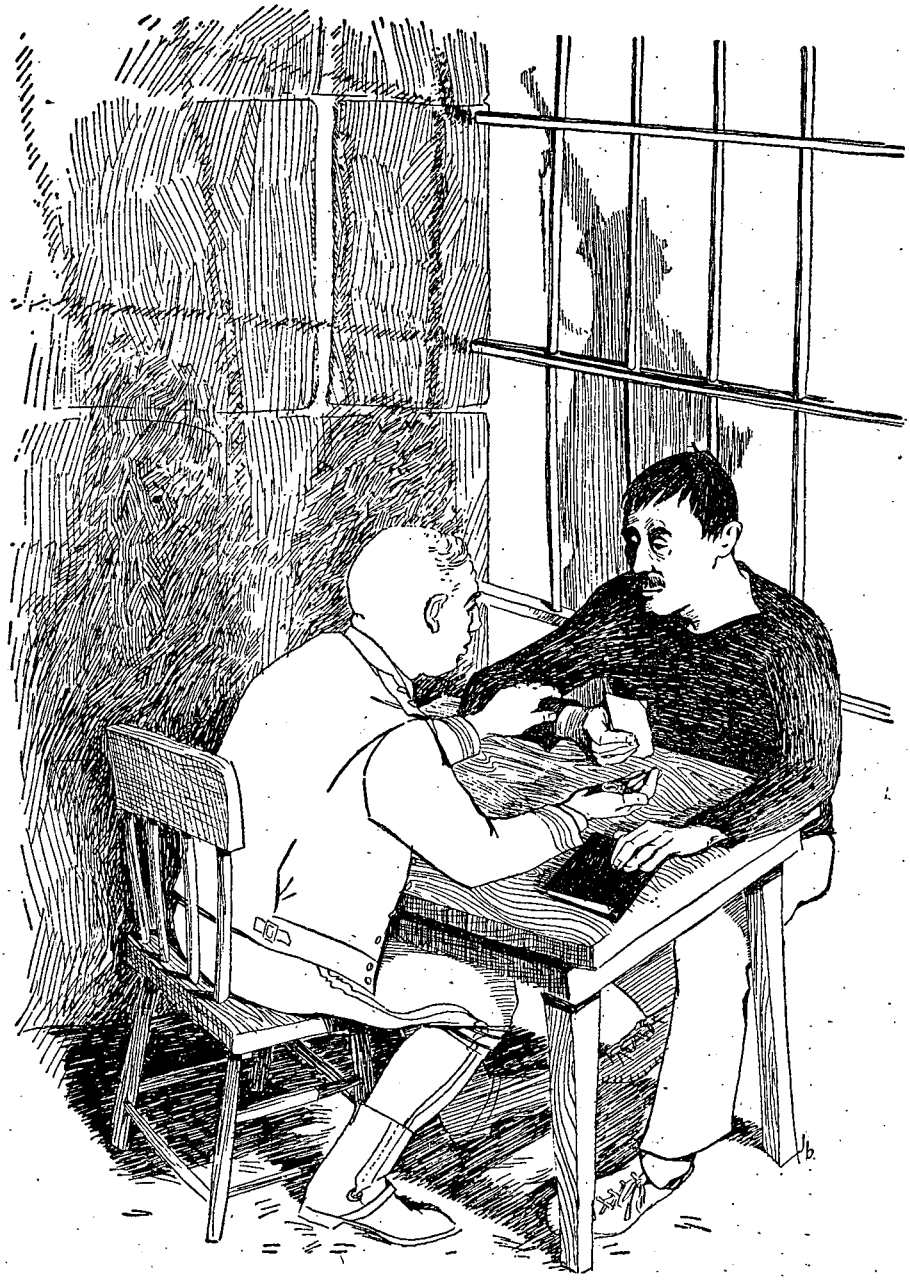

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times, actually accused me of being a spy from the nearby *Island* of *Luggnagg*. He told me then that he had been alerted by *Koorlee* of my arrival in *Balnibari*, and that I had been under constant surveillance since then. His agents had impounded my notes for further study especially as to their possible revelation of any secret military matters.

He also accused me of being a sorcerer from the *Island* of *Glubbdubdrib* who had transformed himself into an American by magic so that I could learn the secret of *Laputa*. It was then that he told that *Laputa* was the prime defense of *Balnibari*, and that I would never learn the extent of its strength either in terms of manpower or in armament. No spy had ever learned the secret, he added, and none would ever learn it.

I was startled by the sudden accusations and this decidedly unfavorable turn of events. I protested my innocence as best I could, but I could see that I was not making any headway. I tried to question *Nallgall* in turn about his earlier life, about his experience in America to find some mutual situation or person who might give us a common ground of understanding but apparently to no avail. In the presence of his officers and subordinates, *Nallgall* appeared adamant in his conviction that I was a spy.

The next three days I languished in prison without knowing what disposition would be made of my case. It was impossible to obtain legal counsel since (I learned later) no lawyer wanted to have his name linked to mine for fear of being considered guilty as an accomplice in this alleged espionage. As a foreigner in *Balnibari* my situation appeared hopeless. The concept of guilt by association is apparently as fixed in the minds of *Balnibarians* as it is among the ignorant and hysterical of our own country.

This was the worst predicament that I had ever been in and I could see no way out. I had resigned myself to death in prison when, much to my surprise, on the fourth morning, *Nallgall* came privately to see me. With a brief word and command, he dismissed the guard. I felt certain that a death sentence was about to be pronounced. To my surprise, however, he took a faded snapshot out of his jacket pocket and asked me to look at it carefully, to study it. The snapshot was that of a girl about sixteen or seventeen years of age. She had large dark eyes and black hair that fell loosely to her shoulders. There was a young man standing beside her, his arm about her waist.

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"It's Marie Angie," he said softly, "Maria Angelica Torres, and that's me beside her. We had just become engaged when my uncle found me. He threatened to kill us both if I didn't come back to *Balnibari*. It was terrible. I've always dreamed of going back to the States to marry her. But it's illegal, impossible; punishable by death for a *Balnibarian* to leave here or marry an outsider."

HE paused a moment and then continued, "I'm now married and have three children. No, I know I shall never be able to get back. You might get back. I can help you escape to *Luggnagg* tonight. Here are your notes. Only two or three pages have been removed for military precautions. It's my duty."

From another pocket he withdrew my treasured notebook and tossed it on the table beside us. I checked it over briefly—only two pages were missing.

"Here," he said after what seemed an endless pause, "is a gift from me you must promise to give her." He took a splendid ring from his pocket and handed it to me. It was the most beautiful ring I had ever seen with a large star sapphire in the center surrounded by crescents of rubies and diamonds.

"You must try to find her. The only address I know is 34 Vista Alta, Monterey. Her older brother's name is Francisco Manuel. Their parents are dead. Tell her it's from *Nallgall*. Tell her I still love her."

At a signal the guards returned, but *Nallgall* had thrust the ring into my pocket along with the address that he had so carefully kept for thirteen years. I thanked him and vowed I would carry out his mission should I return to America safely. It was the last that I ever saw of *Nallgall*. Whatever convinced him that I was not a spy I shall never know.

That night shortly after midnight two men carrying official documents came to visit me and dismissed the guards. Quietly, without other words, they led me out of the prison, gave me a large purse of money, and took me to the waterfront. There, under the cover of darkness I was placed in a single-masted eighteen-foot yawl and ordered to shove off. I was so delighted to be able to "escape" from prison that I did not question my liberators, but quickly unfurled the sail and moved as silently as possible out into the dark sea.

When I was about one hundred yards from shore, I felt I could safely take a few moments to survey my situation. Had I been provided with a compass? Were there any provisions aboard? Were there any maps of

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the neighboring islands? Or was this some further plot against my life?

I cautiously lifted up the tarpaulin at the bow of the boat and, as I did so, found two cucumber jars that began to glow brightly as they were uncovered. In the eerie light I could now see that I was apparently provided for. There were jars of dried fruit, several loaves of bread, dried fish and meat, water, maps, and nautical instruments. Feeling more secure, I covered myself with the tarpaulin and fell asleep.

THE distance from *Balnibari* to *Luggnagg*, according to Gulliver's original maps—and which I have since adequately confirmed—is 22 miles, but the distance to *Glubbdubdrib* is only 13 miles; *Glubbdubdrib* is in a more northerly direction. Although *Glubbdubdrib* is inhabited by sorcerers and magicians, Gulliver found them to be most friendly. I decided, therefore, when I woke the following morning, to try to head toward *Glubbdubdrib*. Fortunately, Gulliver's maps were still so clear and vivid in my mind that I had very little trouble getting there. The few navigational instruments that were left in my little boat were more than ample for this purpose.

In Gulliver's day there was no king in *Glubbdubdrib*, only a Governor. Among this man's fantastic talents was an ability to recall the ancient dead exactly as they were at the height of their careers. Gulliver stayed on this island only ten days but, in this time, he had ample opportunity to have person-to-person interviews with Caesar, Brutus, Hannibal, Alexander, Socrates, and many other famous people. What impressed him most was how history had actually distorted the true facts of their lives, and how much more noble the ancient leaders were compared to their modern counterparts. Gulliver was especially distressed to discover first-hand how much corruption and vice existed in recent times among English royalty and in the courts of the noblemen. He left *Glubbdubdrib* convinced that the British leadership had deteriorated and that this deterioration had spread right down through all stages of society even to the lowest classes.

As my boat approached the island, which I assumed was *Glubbdubdrib*, I was amazed to see many areas that were densely populated with round-domed mud huts much as one finds in Jordan and in other countries of the Middle East. As I got closer, I was even more amazed to find a television antenna raised high above almost every roof. Rather

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than the stationary antennas which we possess, these television antennas were all rotating slowly in a counter-clockwise direction.

As I pulled to the shore, a group of black-skinned people approached me; but since I did not know whether they were *Glubbdubdribs* or *Luggnaggians*, I shouted, *"Fralal"* and *"Blakla"* over and over again until I was certain that I was heard. *"Fralal"* is the *Luggnaggian* word for "Friend"; *"Blakla"* is the *Glubbdubdribian* word for *"Hello"*. When they answered, *"Blakla"* I knew that I had actually arrived in *Glubbdubdrib*.

I was most surprised to discover that all the *Glubbdubdribs* are Negroes—a fact which Gulliver, for reasons which I shall never know, failed to mention. I can only guess that Gulliver was so much a victim of "White supremacy" of his day, and he was so awed by this superior race of Negroes that he could not quite bring himself to declaring this fact publicly. Perhaps he was afraid that his adventure with the *Glubbdubdribs* would be disbelieved and all of his other reports of his travels would, on this account, be regarded as fictitious. As I said before, I don't really understand why Gulliver, who was so meticulously accurate in all his other facts, omitted this important detail in describing the *Glubbdubdribs*.

I AM pleased to report that the government of the *Glubbdubdribs* remained stable these past two hundred-odd years. The present governor, whose name is *Loother Krring*, was most gracious to me when I explained to him that I was a descendant of Gulliver. During my two weeks' stay on the island, I was a guest at his home and, by his magic, I was granted practically every conceivable wish. Furthermore, I was very much impressed by his curiosity and interest in events in Europe and in the United States and in the accounts of my other travels.

Sorcery and magic have continued in *Glubbdubdrib* over the past two centuries and have been enhanced by the application of modern science to the ancient and occult mystic arts. The rotating antennas on each roof are more like rotating *radar* devices than those employed in ordinary television. Furthermore, each adult *Glubbdubdrib* native wears a hemispherical metal helmet (the secret *Brattignil*) on top of which rotates a smaller but similar antenna to that seen on the rooftops. The ones on the homes are powered, it seems, by electricity derived from small vapor-driven generators. Those worn on their heads are powered by

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smaller portable batteries that use solar energy. There is no viewing screen in this television circuit, and none is really necessary.

The antennas on the rooftops can be "beamed" to receive "ghosts" of the past. The antennas worn on the head can be made to rotate in the same frequency as those at home. The image that one "sees" is actually in the brain because the current which is directed through the helmet activates the appropriate visual centers in the occipital lobe. Similarly the mere act of talking enables the inflow or receptive circuit of the helmet to beam the signal to the rooftop, and then to the appropriate "ghosts" or "spirits." One can see and can, therefore, converse with those long dead even while walking in the streets, resting, or eating one's meal. The whole arrangement is far more satisfactory than our own television which immobilizes and benumbs our citizens by compelling them to fix their eyes on a stationary box in their parlor, bedroom, or den.

After a few days of general visiting and sightseeing on the island, *Loother Krring* asked me if there were any noble persons in the past with whom I might like to "visit" via the *Brattignil.* "I will lend you mine, if you like, since we have none to spare. "Here," he added, as he took off his helmet and placed it on my head, "is the way it goes on and these are the tune-in knobs on each side. Be sure the electrodes fit snugly in each ear or you will get only a weak picture."

I must admit that I spent almost the entire week with my head in the *Bratignil,* so much more fascinating is this device than any I have ever seen or known before. My first request was to interview those famous persons mentioned in Gulliver's accounts and confirm the facts that he reported. This I was able to do with ease and, I am pleased to say, Gulliver's report is wholly truthful and reliable. All of the ancient spirits remembered talking with him, and they were very much impressed by his wit and his knowledge of history. It is tragic that Gulliver was not given more recognition for his daring courage and his intellectual honesty during his own lifetime.

SINCE I am a physician and not an historian, my interest soon turned from the nobility and heroes of history to the average man whose life and times have not been adequately recorded.

I saw and spoke to a paralytic at the synagogue at *Capharnaum* just as he was being carried in by his four friends.

"Move your legs," I told him.

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"I can't," he replied helplessly.

"Move your arms," I repeated.

"I can't do that either."

"What happened to you? You behave like a quadriplegic. Did you have an accident?"

"Yes," he answered, "two hours ago I was toiling in my vineyard on the slopes of the Mount of Olives when I stumbled and fell into a ravine. Friends found me lying there. I can't move my arms and legs. My neck is in terrible pain. What do you think is wrong, Doctor?"

"You probably have a fractured cervical spine," I said. "You should be in traction. Tell your friends to turn your body face down and don't buckle the stretcher. Easy there, or you may kill the poor man."

Ten minutes later I saw the same man walk out of the synagogue conversing amiably with his friends. I meant to ask a few more questions, but the power in my *Brattignil* somehow faded. Obviously, I had witnessed a miracle, but I was never able to learn from the patient his own account of the events that took place in those exciting ten minutes.

As the current returned and strengthened, I found myself in Spain on a hot day in July in 1492. I was at the home of Isaac Abarbanel, the martyr, just as he was about to leave for the court of Ferdinand and Isabella to plead with the rulers not to cast the Jews out of Spain.

"What will you do if the plea for clemency to your people is rejected?" I asked.

"I have no choice," he answered. "I will never deny my religion."

"Why be a fool?" I asked. "Why not take the easy way out?"

"I just can't. A man must be a man and stand up for his principles. I will choose exile over dishonor."

And I saw Isaac Abrabanel later (July 2, 1492) and hundreds of his faith carrying their few belongings on board ship driven from the homeland in which they once had prospered. Why man forever has been so brutal to his fellowman or so devoid of being able to recognize kindness and gentleness in the hallowed and sacred of mankind, I shall never understand.

Perhaps I am morbid in my outlook. If so, the reader may choose not to follow me into mankind's past and skip this paragraph entirely. I did, however, talk with a nameless Rabbi of Toledo as he was being forced into the torture chamber of the Inquisition, an African chief of Gabon who was herded with his tribe like cattle into ships waiting for them at Port Gentil of Africa. I saw infants in various parts of the world who had died

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for want of food, frightened men and women huddling in the catacombs before being taken to the coliseum, an elderly New England spinster who had been burned as a witch, a Polish housewife who died in a pogrom in Russia from being beaten and kicked in the abdomen by maddened Cossacks. I saw a gentle little tailor and storekeeper of Minsk who, at pistol point, was being forced into a crematorium at Auschwitz. I talked to a Japanese schoolteacher at Hiroshima a few minutes before he was vaporized in an atomic explosion and to laborers who had frozen to death in the prisons of Siberia.

I TALKED to them all, and none of them could understand why they had died or why they had been the objective of such brutality and vengeance.

"I was studying the Torah in our synagogue when they dragged me away," said the Rabbi of Toledo.

"We had just returned from a zebra hunt when they burnt our village and shot our women," said the African chief.

"Our only sin was worshipping Christ," said one old man in the catacombs of Rome.

"I was on my way to the Meeting House," said the Salem spinster, "when the Governor's men seized me and carried me to jail."

"I was nursing my baby when the Cossacks came," cried the young housewife from Lodz.

"I'm just a poor tailor, I never hurt anybody. What did they want from me?" said the pitiful man at Auschwitz.

"I had just passed out papers for a mathematics test and cautioned my students against cheating," said the bespectacled teacher at Hiroshima.

"I was accused of disloyalty to the party because I received help from my uncle in America," said the bearded prisoner in Siberia.

All of these—and so many others—asked me why they had died. Did history prove that their deaths, in some way, were meaningful? Or were they chance victims of senseless brutality? Had mankind, since their deaths, made any effort to prevent the endless repetition of such atrocities?

I must admit that I could not give these nameless ghosts of the past satisfactory answers to their questions, and I grew more embarrassed and ashamed at each passing day. Everywhere I turned, I saw Justice being perverted, Freedom being denied, and Love for one's Brother ridiculed and rejected. At the end of one week I had witnessed enough of man's inhumanity. I handed the *Brattignil* back to *Loother Krring*.

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"Is there anything else you would like while you are here with us?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied, "as a magician can you tell me about the future? Has mankind learned *anything* from its experience in the past?"

"Well," he answered, "on *Glubbdubdrib* we have not perfected any device for seeing into the future as distinctly as we can view the past through the *Brattignil*. I do have a crude instrument, however, for looking ahead that I am now in the process of perfecting."

THE device that he permitted me to look into is called a *Lumalarl* and is like a kaleidoscope that presents only fragments of pictures that hastily and inconsistently change as the tube is rotated before the eyes. Looking into this instrument, I saw police dogs taking vicious bites of Negroes, men being shot as they climbed a wall, Chinese soldiers moving in full battle regalia across Mongolia, tall buildings crumpling from the impact of atomic explosives, giant factories immobilized while workmen walked aimlessly about the buildings. Everywhere the future seemed as dismal as the past.

"Enough," I said to *Loother Krring*, "*Glubbdubdrib* is a magic island, and you are all magicians. But I am not accustomed to so much preoccupation with the past or the future. I really must be on my way again. Can I leave for *Luggnagg* in the morning?"

"Why do you want to go to *Luggnagg?*"

"*Luggnagg* should be interesting for two reasons," I replied. "First, when Gulliver was there it was ruled by a tyrannical king who made everyone crawl on his belly and lick the floor as he advanced toward the royal throne. Gulliver stayed there three months, was treated kindly, but was most impressed by the *Struldbruggs* or *Immortals*. A *Struldbrugg* child is born with a red circular spot on his forehead directly over his left eyebrow, and it is a mark that the child will grow up and never die. Although *Struldbruggs* never died, they did grow old; and Gulliver discovered, much to his surprise, that immortality without youth and health was a curse rather than a blessing."

"Yes, I know," said *Loother Krring*. "The *Luggnaggians* and *Struldbruggs* are our neighbors, but you would not want to waste your time there at all."

"Why?"

"The royal family was deposed about 110 years ago by some of the younger *Struldbruggs*. Since the *Struldbruggs* were immune to poison, it suddenly occurred to one of them that he might ap-

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proach the throne and lick the floor without dying from the poison that had been sprinkled there by the king's henchmen. One night, in 1854, this *Struldbrugg* disguised himself as an ambassador from *Balnibari* and, with a few other *Struldbruggs*, stabbed the king to death as he sat there on his throne. He then usurped the power of government, and the *Struldbruggs* have since become the dominant *Luggnaggian* group. Most of the other *Luggnaggians* were killed. A few escaped to nearby countries.

"Sounds exciting," I interrupted, "why should this stop me from visiting them?"

"Well, the *Struldbruggs* forgot one thing. It's not the *Struldbruggs* but the *Luggnaggs* that gave birth to other *Struldbruggs*. With the *Luggnaggians* gone, the only *Struldbruggs* that remain there are those who were there in 1854. There is no person in *Luggnagg* who is not at least 100 years old. It is a very depressing country. Much like some of the homes for the very aged that you have in your own land."

I was amazed from time to time at *Loother Krring's* insight and his knowledge of conditions in America and in other parts of the world. But, then, I kept forgetting that he was a magician and could, through magic, see and understand things beyond wisdom. I decided to follow his advice to forego my trip to *Luggnagg* and, instead, try to head homeward again.

MY notebook, which I had carefully kept, indicated that it was now March 2, 1958. It was almost a year since I had departed from Boston on what was to have been a pleasant six-week vacation to Central America. I had had no contact with the outside world, no word from my uncle or my fiancée. Although Gulliver had gone from *Luggnagg* to Japan and then home, I decided to head for Australia which, with luck, I could reach in my small boat by "island-hopping" in a southwesterly direction. From there I could get a plane to London and then to Boston. For this trip, the *Glubbdubdribs* provided me with an adequate supply of food and money (magic?) including six British 100-pound notes. *Loother Krring* and many of his friends accompanied me to the docks and helped to get me safely on my way.

I shall not bother the reader with further details regarding my trip home since it was relatively uneventful. The journey to Australia lasted thirty-seven days and allowed ample time for rest, reflection, and the writing of some portions of this account.

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On the morning of April 7, 1958, as the sun rose in the Pacific behind me, I spied land at due west and before nightfall had anchored my boat securely on a sandy beach. If my calculations were correct, I was then approximately at 150° East longitude and 20° South latitude.

I spent the night on the beach (as I had so often done before), then made my way in a southerly direction along the coast until I came to Brisbane. After disposing of my boat, I went to a hotel, soaked in a warm tub, and purchased several suits of clothing. The 100-pound English bank-notes that *Loother Krring* had given me back in *Glubbdubdrib* were genuine and were more than adequate to cover all these and other expenses.

Two days later I took a plane from Brisbane to Port Elizabeth, South Africa, where I spent a few days visiting some old friends at the Saint Barnabas Hospital. It was they who had been so kind to me a few years earlier when, sick and exhausted, I had landed there after my trip to Brobdingnag. The reunion this time was far more gay and cheerful than it had been then. After a few days rest and visiting, I boarded a plane for London where I arrived on April 22. Although I was anxious to return home, I made a hurried trip to Oxford to visit Doctor Purvis-Freemont at his laboratory and inform him briefly of Lilliput, of Brobdingnag, and of my many other adventures that had all begun in the fall of 1951 when I came to his laboratory to do research in bone metabolism. He was pleased to find that I looked so well and that I had kept such detailed notes, "worthy of a careful scientist."

On May 3, 1958, I left London by B.O.A.C. plane and arrived the same day at Boston. Since I had already written to both my uncle and my financée, they were waiting at Logan airport. The reunion was a tender and happy one. But in my mind was the secret thought that someday I would again venture to sea, to visit the one country that impressed Gulliver most—Land of the Houyhnhynms, where intelligent and kindly horses ruled miserable and despicable men called Yahoos.

What has happened to the Houyhnhynms, since Gulliver's day, I wondered. What has happened to the Yahoos? Until I knew the answers to these questions my mind would never be at ease. Besides, in my pocket, I still had the ring that reminded me of my promise to *Nallgall* in *Balnibari*, that I would someday try to find his beloved Maria Angelica Torres. This promise, too, I knew I had to keep.

THE END

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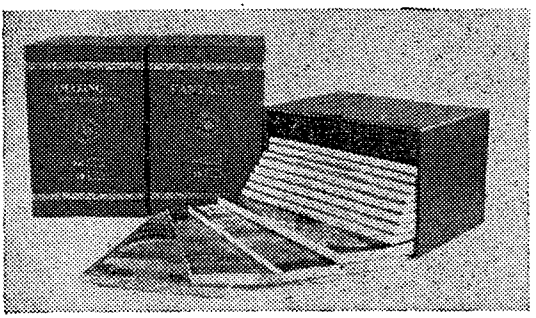

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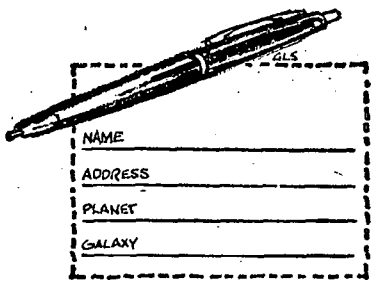

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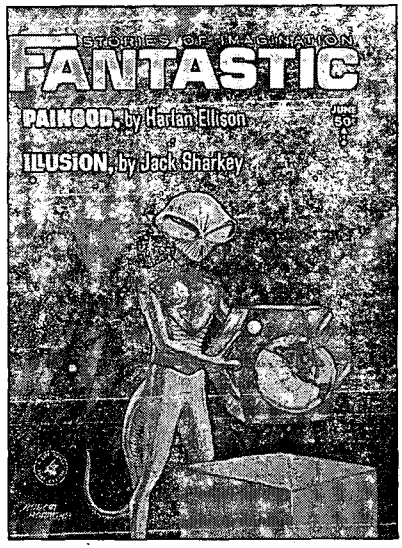

Harlan Ellison returns to FANTASTIC to feature the June issue. His story, Paingod, examines the implications of misery and agony ordered by a wise and just Supreme Being—and shows what happens to the Being involved. Complete with the usual Ellison pyrotechnics.

Also in next month's FANTASTIC, a short story by Jack Sharkey, Illusion, which approaches the compact-with-the-Devil plot form yet another — and ingenious — aspect, which could only be concocted by a Sharkey-ish mind. Plus, of course, many other stories, possibly a Fantasy Classic novelet, and our usual features.

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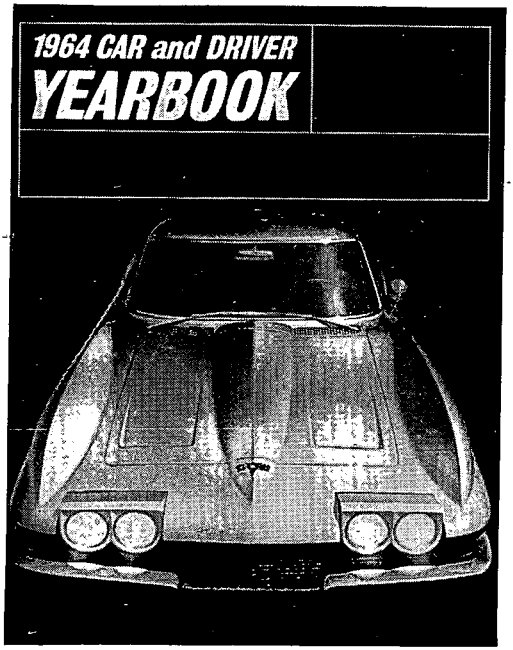

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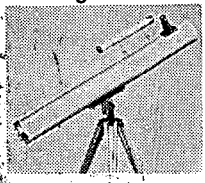

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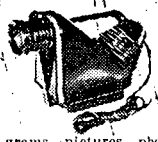

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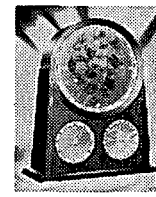

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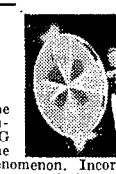

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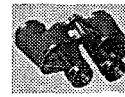

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